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BY

S.S.

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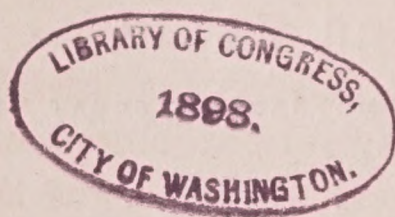
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## P R E F A C E.

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To those who have seen much of human life, and have been intimately associated with its joys and sorrows, there are few of our accepted aphorisms which appear less true than that all romance must necessarily cease after marriage.

Granting, however, that married life does close the door upon many outward exhibitions of a romantic nature, it is still impossible to believe that, so far as the development of character is concerned, it is not rich in that higher order of interest which includes the exercise of principle, as well as the manifestation of feeling. It is true that the great depth and reality of this interest must lie—and, indeed, ought to lie—forever buried in the hearts which it most concerns; yet there are floating on the surface of married life, and evident to all observers, such elements of hope and fear—of peace and strife—of upward and downward progress, as are well calculated to adorn the page of fiction with some degree of novelty in addition to its truth.

As a very slight sketch of this phase of human experience, particularly developing the character of woman, I have woven the following simple stories, not without hope that they may remind some of my



own sex of their highest capabilities, and suggest, at the same time, the almost unbounded extent to which they may be exercised for the welfare and happiness of all with whom they are associated, as well as for their own.

S. S. E.

ROSE HILL, May, 1860.



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## CHAPTERS ON WIVES.

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### ISABEL.

THERE are old-fashioned English homes which never look so lovely as in the dreamy stillness of a summer's afternoon, just at that hour when the shadows first begin to creep in lengthened lines along the grass, and the hill-sides, sloping westward, are bathed in liquid gold. With the soft deep glow of this quiet hour there is something peculiarly harmonious in our broad homesteads, and sweep of cultivated lands, with rich umbrageous trees, and velvet pastures, and gentle billows of green corn swelling with the breeze. There is something in all this more harmonious with the hour than in those more gorgeous scenes which the traveler may boast of having seen, while in the secret chambers of his memory he keeps enshrined the picture of his English home, to be visited when his soul is tired with splendor and excitement, and pines for the greenness, the freshness, and repose of some valley among gently-swelling hills, where the blackbird warbles and the lambs play undisturbed among the yellow furze, and, best of all, where his own feet have trod in happy childhood.

On a smooth green terrace, stretching along one side of a noble mansion, just at this glowing time of day, sat a young English lady, in perfect keeping with the scene which spread before and around; her face, complexion, form, and mien constituting the noblest part of that uni-



versal harmony, of which her voice, when she spoke, was the sweetest and the happiest note.

It might well be happy, for she had been caroling to a rosy child, who echoed back his mother's thrilling laugh with playful mimicry, until the merriment became real, and nurse, and child, and mother made that quiet garden ring with musical delight.

But the precious hours were passing, and the time was drawing near when Isabel Grant (for that was the lady's name) was wont to seat herself, whenever the weather permitted, on a certain seat at the end of the highest terrace, from whence she could see a turn in the road leading up to the house. How women can anticipate! It wanted yet three quarters of an hour to the appointed time. Isabel half fancied her watch must be in fault, so slowly had the hands crept onward since last she looked at it. Well, it was pleasant to sit there at all events, the view was so rich, and wide, and beautiful, and perhaps he would be returning earlier than usual that day. So she sent the nurse away to feed the swans, and, folding her white arms in an attitude of patience, sat and gazed. Little patience, indeed, would have been needed to gaze on such a scene, had there not been some event anticipated, some arrival expected, or some object looked for, of such brightness and such interest to her as to throw all others into shade.

Isabel was only looking for her husband—only!—and he had been no farther than London, a distance of little more than twenty miles. There could be no romance in this—perhaps no poetry, only that wherever human love is deepest, strongest, purest, there must be poetry, even though it may find no utterance in verse.

Poetry there certainly was in Isabel's own face and figure, though all unconsciously so to herself; for she was no genius, and, what is a little more rare, she was



no coquette—never had been; rather a noble, liberal, equal-tempered, true English gentlewoman—the finest type of woman.

Isabel had been married to Captain Grant rather more than two years. This was her first summer spent at home, their long tour on the Continent having kept them abroad until the previous summer was past. During the course of this tour they had visited all the favorite places of accustomed resort, and Isabel had heartily admired and enjoyed them all. But her home—her fine old English home—looked lovelier to her, on her return, than any spot of earth she had ever visited—not the less so that she was herself a true Englishwoman at heart, prone to settle down into a home as a kind of nest, or rather a place to take root in; for to such a disposition it is absolutely necessary to take root in order to grow and flourish. There must be a warm and genial root-place too—good soil in which the fibres necessary for vigorous growth may strike deep, and take lasting hold. Those who find their happiness in hurrying from place to place, and know no health of mind or body without perpetual change, can understand little of this deep root-hold, or the comfort and support which it affords. It is, in fact, not necessary to them. They are the rambling plants of the human garden, and can hang their lighter tendrils from bough to bough, or flaunt their blossoms in sun and breeze without asking of the earth any more substantial sustenance.

Of a very different stamp from these was the young wife of Captain Grant. The first impression made by her appearance was that of a fine woman—majestic, yet lovely; tender in her affections, yet firm in her resolve. With hair, and eyes, and complexion of that character which we generally understand by pure Saxon, she had a noble contour of head and profile, which would scarce-



ly have been out of place among the finest models of classic beauty; and her neck and shoulders were almost queenly. Yet, with all this, there was that homish and domestic look about her, that cheery laugh which sets others laughing, and a kind expression in her soft blue eyes, which altogether made her so much more attractive than fearful, that all who dwelt beneath her roof, even down to the most obscure dependent, felt that they had a friend in their young mistress, whose kind consideration they believed in as implicitly as in her sound judgment and good sense.

Great, of course, had been the wonder of the domestics living in the family as to what kind of wife the dear young gentleman, their beloved master, would bring home. They knew that in him they had the best of masters—too good, they almost feared, to be mated with equal goodness. Thus they had feared, and not unreasonably, that the pleasant easy rule they had enjoyed under the captain would be exchanged for something far less pleasant under a mistress. Nor was it immediately that their fears subsided; for Isabel, with all her gentleness and love of peace, was still a disciplinarian, and did not hesitate to assume at once that just and true authority which she felt to be her right. Soon, however, all became convinced that her wise government was best for all; and, before Isabel had guided the reins of domestic management for many weeks, every member of the household had learned to love her more than she was feared.

The consciousness of this love, and the perfect trust which, in return, she reposed in those around her, added no small amount to that pure contentment which beamed almost without a cloud from Isabel's countenance, brightening the clear beauty of her eyes, and illuminating her smile with something more than the gladness of happy



youth. Her very step was that of one who treads the earth without a sense of fear. Fear of personal danger there was no need of to one so well and faithfully supported. But those other fears—fears of being deceived, let down, disappointed—fears of being unjustly or unkindly treated—such were the fears that Isabel never knew; and thus it was that her step, though graceful, was firm as faith itself.

Many fears there are which come naturally and necessarily with affliction; but these also Isabel had never known. She had been early left an orphan, scarcely conscious of the loss of either parent, and had been as tenderly nurtured in the family of an uncle, who was her guardian, as if she had been his own child. Her inheritance, like her education, had been liberal. She was apt to learn, and generous to bestow; equal in her temper too, self-possessed, loving justice and truth supremely, with no tendency to caprice or waywardness; so that it was scarcely possible that Isabel should have enemies; and being, by the nature of her circumstances as well as her own character, always plentifully supplied with friends, she had known no sorrow beyond the causeless tears of childhood, or those imaginary griefs which only serve to heighten the enjoyment of a happy youth.

Something of this equanimity and contentment might be attributed, no doubt, to an excellent physical constitution. The perfect smoothness of Isabel's finely-developed forehead, the clear untainted blue of her large soft eyes, and the rich blush which tinted but never stained her cheeks, all indicated that purity of blood and evenness of pulse which belong to perfect health; while her figure, somewhat beyond the middle size, yet softly and delicately formed, was so well proportioned, upright, and true to all the purposes of life and action, that it was



evident it had known but little of the ills that flesh is heir to.

Isabel's uncle, a naval officer, had all the strictly honorable notions of an old-fashioned English gentleman, blended with the warm affections of a kindly heart. His theory of discipline was strict, his practice somewhat lax, for his tenderness was easily excited; and although his temper was hasty, and his reproofs sometimes severe, he was always open to the appeals of affection, and more prone to pity than to punish, whatever the offense might be. The character of his wife was cast in a very different mould. From her Isabel had learned much, though always leaning to her uncle for that tenderness which her own nature, like his, seemed unable to do without.

If ever Isabel experienced the sensation of fear it was toward her aunt, Lady Manners; but even in this case the sensation only served to exercise a wholesome discipline over the joyous elasticity of her youth. And from the same source, in all probability, there came that self-government, as well as that courteous and considerate manner toward others, for which Isabel was so remarkable. With her uncle alone she would scarcely have acquired these valuable attainments. His buoyant nature was too easily overcome by her affectionate playfulness; nor was there always any certainty that he would not himself be the first to break through whatever rules he might have laid down for her conduct. With her aunt it was widely different. Even the religion of Lady Manners partook of the formal and rigid character which marked her own life. But then it *was* religion—not merely the form, but the reality; and the self-denying consistency with which it was maintained secured for the admiral's lady the sincere esteem of all to whom her integrity and worth were sufficiently known.

That Isabel loved her aunt she never permitted her-



self for a moment to doubt; and yet there were times, perhaps, when walking through the noble hall of her own mansion, or tracing at will the garden walks, or snatching up rare and precious flowers, or following out any other girlish impulse of the moment, when a kind of joyousness came over her, connected with a sense of liberty which she knew must owe its happy existence to the fact that her aunt was not there. Still Isabel loved her, she was quite sure, and most especially now that they were separated, when all the kind solicitude bestowed upon her childhood came back to her memory without the stern denial or the absolute command.

The tide of enjoyment would never roll so high if wholly unmoved by any counter influence; and Isabel was prepared by these circumstances, as well as by her own nature, fully to appreciate every height and depth of that perfect happiness which now seemed to have fallen to her lot. Sometimes it seemed to her too much—almost more than human nature was calculated to sustain. Yet what could she spare of all those treasures which Heaven had so bountifully poured into her lap? Not her child, most assuredly; nor yet her gallant sailor husband. She would almost have laughed had any idea presented itself of losing *them*, so impossible would such a calamity have appeared.

To some women the profession of a naval officer would have suggested danger; but Isabel had been used to that profession in her uncle's case, and to her its various contingencies of storm and calm, its varieties of scene and climate, had been so familiarly discussed from her early childhood, that she thought no more of danger connected with life at sea than with any other adventurous career, such as she had learned to look upon as the fitting course of a high-souled English gentleman; besides which, all Europe was at peace just then. There



was nothing to apprehend on that ground. A little pleasant cruising, perhaps a year at some foreign station, to which she might accompany her husband, were the only serious changes which Isabel had at all anticipated; and to her imagination, in consequence of what her uncle had told her, a well-built ship of war was as safe as any habitation on land—the admiral thought more so.

In Isabel's own nature, too, there was that strong tendency to repose and trust which it takes many adverse winds and cruel storms to overthrow. Perhaps she was a little, just a little too much disposed to let things take their course, and to believe that course would be not only a right, but a pleasant one. At all events, she never courted trouble, nor met her griefs half way. A woman of her type, situated in a lower sphere, would have been called a comfortable woman; but there were loftier elements in Isabel's character than could have been fitly classed under this head. She was happy—profoundly, religiously happy—at peace with all the world, because her soul was at peace with God. She loved his creatures with a true heart of tenderness, which had first melted under the conviction of that infinite love that was breathed out in agony upon the cross. Isabel was a true believer, as she was a true wife, true mother, true in all things. No dogmas of skepticism disturbed her equal mind. To find grounds for doubting what the Bible told her afforded her neither interest nor pleasure. It had been *the* book of her childhood, cherished all through her youth, but never so profoundly valued as now that she had other lives committed to her care, other hopes to keep alive besides her own, other feet to endeavor to allure into the path of peace.

With this deep foundation for her happiness, Isabel looked around her on that summer's afternoon, and, in



her quiet but intense way of dwelling upon what she loved, contemplated that visible superstructure of prosperity and enjoyment which made her home a paradise to her. So still was every thing just then in earth and air, that she could hear, far down the garden walks beside the fish pond, the merry laughter of the nurse, and the little mimic call of the child to the swans, and then the crowing delight with which he saw them snatch the crumbs cast rather discursively from his little hand; and the young mother longed to spring from the terrace, and run down to share this joyous entertainment, but her steps were checked by the deeper joy in anticipation. She was never absent from that spot exactly at the time when the carriage which conveyed her husband home was expected to make the turn in the road which she could see from that part of the grounds, and that alone. So soon as it came in sight she left the terrace, and hastening down to a low ivied door into a shady walk through the shrubbery, there met her husband with a never-failing welcome on her lips. He also knew how he would be watched, and how met; and, true as time, he never failed to come almost at the appointed moment, entering by the ivied door, and leaving the carriage to go empty on its way.

Only one thing caused Isabel the slightest trouble on these occasions; it was that trick of beginning to expect her husband so much too soon. But then she never wearied of the scene before her, especially as the shadows lengthened, and the western sky began to glow with deeper radiance. On this afternoon there was a glory about the sun's descending which she thought surpassed all she had ever seen.

"Happy omen of a bright to-morrow," Isabel said to herself as she directed her eyes once more to the road, and then, beholding nothing there, looked away into the



far distance, where woods, and fields, and hedge-row trees all blended into that exquisite purple which is at the same time blue with ethereal tinting, and brown with rugged stems of trees, and fallow fields, and cottage roofs covered with time-worn thatch. What makes that marvelous coloring of the distance, even in a level country, beautiful? Who shall say? And yet how many eyes gaze on it admiringly, some soothed, and some enchanted—all wooed and won by the wonderful harmony with which it comes between us and the sky, partaking both of earth and heaven—Nature's own look of tender, loving invitation, when she bids us come onward, and ever onward, where earth is etherealized, and heaven brought down, and where we shall realize the true perfection of living!

Isabel, gazing on that aerial distance, thought it very beautiful; but to her there were nearer beauties which she better loved. In one sense she loved all; but hers was a nature to gather in, close to her loving heart, all that she held dearest. Thus her contemplations were more attracted to that which was familiar and near, than general or distant; and thus she loved a garden, perhaps, more than a landscape. All its individual flowers; its rare and beautiful shrubs; its shadowy trees, and winding walks, and stately terraces; its fountains whispering their sweet music amid the hum of bees and chirp of flitting birds—all these, even the minutest, Isabel loved to have around her in richest glory and perfection, and in each she found a distinct and peculiar delight.

All animal life, too, had its charm for Isabel, as it always has to such natures. Her favorite dog was not discarded for her child, but held his place beside her, even on the terrace, where he, too, waited with eager anticipation for his master's coming. Nor was the avi-



ary less enjoyed, now that she could visit it with that young Titan in her arms, who would have clutched the various inmates if he could, and crushed their little lives out with one grasp.

As the young mother gazed from the terrace, she was far from being insensible to what was going on in the fields and pastures lying near the outskirts of the gardens. She had her favorite cattle, as well as her horse, and she saw in the distance the cow-boy driving home the herd, as she thought, with much unnecessary harsh treatment and haste; and while she knit her fair brows, looking intently in that direction, she prepared in her own mind a lecture for the boy, who was a new inmate of the farm, and did not understand the kind and beneficent rule under which he had come to serve.

Isabel was deeply occupied with this scene (for she could not endure cruelty or oppression under any form) when suddenly, to her astonishment, and before she had time to turn her head, two manly arms were clasped around her neck, and a cheek was pressed to hers whose touch was too familiar not to be recognized in a moment—too dear not to be always welcome.

“Why, Archy,” exclaimed Isabel, as soon as she was able to disengage herself, “how did you come? I never saw the carriage, and yet—”

“Ah! you could not help looking at the cows, and so forgot the carriage,” said a fine manly voice.

Isabel declared it was not so. She said she had only one eye for the cows, the other for the road. But the mystery was soon explained. Captain Grant had not returned by the usual way. He had entered the house by an opposite door, and, passing directly through the hall, had approached his wife from behind, stealing gently along the velvet turf, in order to startle her by his sudden entrance. Why he had come home in this way



he did not explain, and his wife was too glad to have him near her to care much about this little change in his accustomed habits.

And well indeed might the woman who was loved by such a man be pleased to have that noble figure seated near her, to look into his open face, where never cloud of shame, nor mystery, nor any thing, in fact, which man need hide, had left a shadow or a trace, and to know that those clear eyes, blue as the vault above, reflected no image so faithfully or so tenderly as her own.

Captain Archibald Grant was perhaps not, literally speaking, a handsome man. His features bore no resemblance to any hero of classical celebrity, and he was far enough from looking sentimental, or even poetical. He had too much of the English sailor for that in his frank unstudied manner, in his hearty laugh, and in the playful boyish pranks which generally announced, beyond mistake, his happy and exciting return to home, and wife, and child. Yet with all this there was blended at times such tender and sweet kindness, such evident impossibility of his doubting or thinking ill of any one in whom he had once believed, such glorious bravery of front and mien, that all who loved the captain—and they were nearly all who knew him—thought him one of the finest-looking men of their acquaintance, so agreeable, and at the same time so noble, was the aspect which he bore.

It was the custom with both parents, on the return of the captain, as soon as the first interchange of intelligence had taken place between them in the shrubbery walk—the first telling of any little private matters which concerned themselves—to hasten to find the child, whether in the garden or the nursery, and so to witness together, with delighted admiration, what time had done for him during the six or eight hours of his father's ab-



sence. Great and wonderful were the exploits which the nurse recounted on these happy occasions, for sometimes even words had been spoken—what first and only child does not speak words before it is three months old?—or other manifestations had to be described of remarkable intelligence, or singular development of precocious feeling.

To-day, however, the captain sat still beside his wife upon the terrace seat—very still, and often looking away. He did not even ask about the boy; and when his wife inquired if he was tired, or not quite well, he started, looked round at her, and, instead of speaking, ran his fingers up among his rich brown hair, shredding it into wavy curls that fell at will about his brow and temples. This was a trick the captain had whenever he began to think, and especially when he was perplexed about any matter which he could not solve, or settle satisfactorily.

Isabel cast a slight glance toward him once or twice. She was too wise to ask abruptly what was the matter, but waited, thinking there had been business at the Admiralty that day which had in all probability detained him, as well as sent him home with something more than usual to think about. She, however, did venture to propose that they should go and see the child; but her purpose was checked by a somewhat hasty “Not yet,” and she had nothing for it but to wait.

At length her husband started up suddenly, saying, “Let us go into the library.” They both went without another word, and passing through the hall toward a large low room in a retired part of the house, entered, and shut the door.

Isabel would have felt a thrill of fear just then if she had ever known what real trouble was; for who that has experienced much of life’s vicissitudes does not understand that shutting to of a door, when there has been



no accustomed need for privacy? Still Isabel remained perfectly calm and self-possessed; and not even when her husband took her hand and looked steadily into her face did she flinch, or tremble, or turn pale, or wear more than a look of simple inquiry on her face.

"Isabel," said her husband, speaking with a sudden gasp for breath, "what do you think your uncle, the admiral, has been proposing to me?"

"I can not tell," said Isabel. "Perhaps that you should be promoted."

The captain uttered a hasty expression, as if his wife's guess was foolishly wide of the mark; and then, with evident effort, he began to tell her how the admiral and another gentleman of rank and influence, with whom he had lunched that day, had proposed to him to take the command of an exploring expedition, about to be sent out by government, to a part of the world where there was so much to be apprehended from peculiarities of climate, and other adverse circumstances, that no ordinary amount of courage and resolution was required on the part of those who engaged personally in the undertaking.

All this took a good while to explain, and Isabel remained all the time perfectly silent. No tear dimmed her eye, no convulsive movement indicated that her emotions were gaining mastery over her habitual self-command. At last her husband ceased, and as he pressed the hand he had been holding to his lips, it was evident that he waited for her to speak.

To speak, however, was not so easy as to stand and gaze, and gaze, and see nothing—only to *feel*; and with excess of feeling Isabel had grown almost rigid, and so pale! for the life-blood seemed all to have left the surface of her body, to circle in hot rushing waves around her heart. Her lips were blue as well as pale, and a



strange livid hue was beginning to spread about her mouth and eyes, when, with a great effort, she cleared her voice to speak.

“What do you say, my angel wife?” her husband asked; “for without your entire consent nothing will be done. I have said nothing, agreed to nothing. It was a mere suggestion made to me in perfect privacy; and if I decline it altogether, no one besides your uncle will ever know. There will be no dishonor either in my declining, your uncle tells me—none whatever. Now, what do you say?”

“What is it?” asked Isabel. “Explain to me what it is.”

Her husband did explain that a commander of the expedition was required who knew the intricacies of coast and river, who understood the nature of the climate and the character of the people, and that he, when serving under her uncle, had acquired this knowledge. The admiral, from his long acquaintance with that quarter of the world, had been consulted confidentially, and he was of the opinion that he could obtain the appointment for any one whom he might strongly recommend. Prudence was eminently necessary, as well as courage and resolution; and both gentlemen had done Captain Grant the honor to express their confidence in this respect. In fact, nothing seemed wanting but age, and that objection they also seemed inclined to think might be overcome.

“Now, what do you say, my precious wife?” the husband asked again.

“Do you wish to go?” said Isabel.

“I wish,” he answered, “to do my duty to my sovereign and my country. I have no relish for ease and idleness forever—you know that. I should have liked an expedition with more glory in it better—I dare say



you know that too. Perhaps I should have liked fighting with an open foe better than contending against fever, and wild beasts, and savages as wild, but more barbarous. The servant, however, must not choose his work; and how much soever I may wish the question had never been asked me whether I should be willing to go or not, it *has* been asked, you see, and I must answer it, only you must first answer me. What, then, do you say, my own Isabel? As we stand here in the sight of God, what is it you bid me do?"

"I know only one answer," replied Isabel. "It is that England expects every man to do his duty, and every woman must do the same. Therefore it is that I say, *Go*."

No sooner had these words been uttered, and so become in one sense irrevocable, than the husband threw himself with both arms upon the table before him, and, burying his face upon them, wept aloud.

His wife did not approach him. She did not dare to trust her loving fingers among his beautiful hair, still less to attempt to press her lips to his forehead. She had done what she believed to be her duty, and she was not going to undo it now. Taking a little time to recover herself, she looked out from the low, shaded window, beholding nothing, but gathering a little strength, for which she was the more solicitous, that her husband's seemed to fail. Had both sunk at once during this crisis the result would have been inevitable; the proposal must have been rejected—the project given up. But where man is weakest, woman finds her strength; and Isabel came back after a few moments had elapsed, and, seating herself opposite her husband, said to him in a grave and business-like manner:

"I want to hear all about the expedition, Archy. I should think it might be very interesting, if not quite so glorious as we should like."



In this manner Isabel pursued her inquiries with such minuteness and apparent interest, that her husband was completely beguiled; and raising his head, and wiping away his tears, he began to explain to her all the particulars with which he himself was acquainted, thinking (good honest soul!) that his wife was profoundly attentive all the time.

If Isabel was *acting*, may God forgive us all! for often when we do our best, even up to the highest reach of heroism, we are but hiding what we feel; while all the virtue of what we do depends entirely upon our not appearing to be exactly what we are.

So Isabel went on with her inquiries as minutely as she could, until she saw that her husband was himself again; and such was the natural energy of his character, his love of enterprise, his delight in action—such, in short, the *manliness* of his nature, that he soon recovered all his wonted animation, and became almost eloquent in his descriptions of what he should have to meet with, what difficulties to encounter, what would devolve upon him personally in the discharge of a delicate and confidential trust, and what he should be likely to accomplish in the space of *three years*, which was the time specified for the expedition.

Isabel had not heard any mention of time before, and she started at the sound of three years. Her husband did not observe it, and as she made no remark, he went on again in the same manner, talking himself into a state of high excitement, if not actually into a state of considerable delight at the prospect opening before him. It was not so, however, deep down in his heart. To him the ties of domestic life, the claims of wife and child, were more than to most men. The reason why he went on talking in this way, never doubting but his wife was feeling exactly as he did, was simply that he was a *man*



—yes, a fine, frank, noble-hearted, *real* man, with no pretense about him; one who could not but have shown what he was feeling, even to save the life of his wife.

Such is the difference between man and woman. What folly to descant upon which is stronger or weaker, which is better or worse than the other, seeing they are only by nature so distinct in their characteristics in order that they may better fill their appointed place in the creation, each gifted with the qualifications necessary for their peculiar duties.

That evening, so precious to Isabel, because all evenings must now be drawing nearer toward the last, was one of the longest she had ever experienced. She did so much want to be alone, that she might let the bitterness of her soul gush out in great floods of tears. She would not weep now. Her husband was peculiarly sensitive to any outward manifestation of distress; so she scarcely permitted one tear to escape. She dared not, indeed, begin to weep, for all would be over then. Thus she walked in the garden and the grounds with her husband until the sun had set, and the large full moon had risen in a cloudless sky. She loitered with him about all their favorite spots; she listened with him to the fountain's musical fall; she wandered with him toward a shady copse where the nightingale on such soft dewy evenings was always heard; she watched with him the slumbering shadows of the great old trees that stretched their paternal arms overhead; she went with him through all the accustomed routine of little home enjoyments; only one thing she could not do—she could not have the child brought in to them for his last “good-night” before he went to sleep, to be tossed in his pretty night-dress, laughing and screaming, up in his father's arms. This was precisely what Isabel felt that she could *not* bear, so she made excuses to the nurse, and contrived



some other amusement, with which the happy child was satisfied, and went to sleep. "Happy child!" thought Isabel, "he will never know his loss." And then she thought, if any thing should happen to herself before her husband's return—for she was expecting another addition to her domestic cares—she dared not think of it now as an addition to her domestic enjoyments.

Even when the night came Isabel dared not give vent to those pent-up tears which nature seemed to be telling her that she must weep before she could find rest; and the restraint which she imposed upon herself was sufficient to drive away all sleep, even had such refreshment been otherwise attainable. But no; sleep was impossible, for the night only brought those vivid thoughts which seem to burn into the heart with a fierceness like that of fire. And as they burn they grow in magnitude and power, because there is no visible object, nor symbol of other griefs to compare them with; and thus the darkness becomes intolerable, and we long for the dawning of another day, though that must bring us so much nearer to the doom we dread.

Isabel was too well pleased to find her husband had fallen into sound and healthy sleep to attempt any conversation, which might otherwise have helped her through the long and silent hours—so long, though it was a summer's night, it seemed to her as if the morning would never break. At last she heard the small faint chirp of happy birds just awaking to their joy. Ah, what a sound is that to those who know no joy in waking! Yet what a lesson it might teach! For have not those very warblers had their long winter to endure? and how they do endure it, God only knows. Yet, sure as the return of the seasons appointed by the Sovereign of the universe, their pleasures come again, and that glad anthem of rejoicing hails the morning with as deep delight, as if they



had never known the cold and hunger of a world all leafless, homeless, barren, and desolate to them.

There is a certain perverseness in heavy human grief which will not let us accept in alleviation the small comforts that we might; and Isabel refused to be consoled, or in any way beguiled of her great sorrow by the warbling of early birds; not even when their voices swelled into a full chorus of exultation, and she could hear them answering from tree to tree, telling how this great and abundant world was rich, and beautiful, and glorious still.

The softness of a grief subdued had not yet come to Isabel. She had not yet wept her tears of resignation. She had not yet prayed with her whole soul, for that she knew would bring tears. She was consequently far from feeling in unison with the song of happy birds, or with any other of those sweet influences which belong to the awakening of universal nature in the early dawn of a summer's day.

When at last the long-wished-for morning was fully come, the necessity for exertion lent a kind of strength to Isabel for what she had to do and to endure. Her husband was obliged to leave home for the day. He had to give his answer to the momentous question which had been put to him. His first waking impressions had not been favorable to the project. We often feel faint-hearted on awaking—especially faint-hearted about exchanging the comforts of the home where we have slept so soundly, for inconveniences and dangers, which never look so repulsive as in the first view we take of them in the morning.

Isabel knew that with her husband's impulsive nature there was a tendency to reaction. She was prepared for this, and now she must arise and put the armor on, and face all difficulties herself. She had thought of all this,



of almost every thing, during that long night. In a few hours she had passed through experience enough for years of ordinary life. Her great mental business had been to set her affections on one side, and her strong sense of duty on the other, and so decide as a Christian woman, though a wife and a mother, ought to decide. Thinking it possible that her first decision might have been too hasty (though something still told her it was right), she weighed the whole matter over again, examining every consideration both for and against; and through and above all remained that solemn conviction upon which she had first spoken—spoken so sadly against herself.

Whatever this trial might cost her, then, or whatever burden she might have to bear, Isabel's mind was not distracted with doubts. She honored her husband too much to desire to see him condemned to a life of useless inaction, even if always by her side. She knew him to be peculiarly fitted, both by nature and habit, for the work which had been planned out for him. He had energies and powers which she admired even more than his noble face and manly person—capabilities which she gloried in even more than in the alacrity of his bounding step when he sprang to meet her on returning home. Yes, there was a higher, deeper, holier love than that of mere possession which hallowed the feelings of the young wife—a loftier impulse which thrilled through her whole being, with that true ambition that knows no selfish alloy, and is satisfied with nothing short of the highest and the best. It was her husband's highest and best, Isabel thought, to be employed on useful service for his country and mankind; and thus it was that she arose, after that sad and solemn night, though weak in body, yet strong in the conviction that for her husband it was right to go.



Sustained by this power, she was able, when he came down into the breakfast-room, to meet him with a calm and resolute expression of countenance; and when, afterward, he called her again into the library, and said he could not go without one more earnest consultation, she was prepared to find something to say in favor of the project, whatever objection to it he might bring forward.

Captain Grant was astonished at the part which his wife took in this matter—astonished at what she said, and at her manner altogether. She looked, he thought, like one inspired. He had never seen her so before. He did not understand the woman he had married—few men do; yet he was sensible of an influence such as he had no idea that any human being could exercise over him. If he had doubted before, it was impossible for him to doubt now. There must, he thought, be something right, something almost imperative, where a woman so loving and so tender could act this firm and self-denying part. His own ardor would have been very weak that morning but for his wife. He had been thinking of a deadly climate, fever, prostration of strength, and last, but not least, of an obscure, untended, and perhaps lingering death; until, though he would have been the first to rush into the heat of open battle, his great heart actually quailed before the prospect which his imagination painted.

“You are afraid, Archy,” said Isabel, looking full into his face with her clear, steady eyes.

“Afraid! No, Isabel, you know me better than to think that; but I own I should like to die in a different way.”

“Why should you die, my love? No man can have a better constitution than yours.”

“Nay, I don’t expect to die, exactly; but, if there is



any thing in the world I am afraid of, it is swamp and fever."

"You know one thing, Archy?"

"What is that?"

"That whether there is danger in the path of duty or not, there can be no real safety out of it."

"You say right, my blessed wife. I will go."

"Cheerfully?"

"Yes, cheerfully, too. Take my faithful promise with this kiss that you will never hear me talk in this way again."

Captain Grant was true to his promise. He rose up a strong man, and immediately beginning to occupy himself with the few preparations which he had to make, he might soon have been seen springing into his carriage with as light a step as usual; and then, waving his hand from the window, he was gone like a flash of light.

"Gone!" said the nurse, who was holding the child up at an open window to see papa; and the little fellow also did his best to say, "Gone!" Isabel heard it, and hastened up into her room. Now was her time. She turned the key in the door, fell down on her knees beside a couch, and wept as if her heart was breaking.

Long and terrible was the agony of grief with which her whole frame was convulsed; but nature has the happy art of working her own cure, and by the bleeding of her wounds promotes their healing. When the first natural outburst of tears had in some measure abated, a solemn calm ensued, and holier feelings took the place of womanly sorrow. Isabel could pray now, perhaps more fervently than she had ever prayed before, casting her whole life, her being, and not hers alone, but those of her husband and her child, into the hands of her Heavenly Father, to do with them according to his own good pleasure. There was no safety for any of them,



she felt, but in His keeping. He could make all safe, wherever they might be, and however widely separated.

In this long communion between her soul and her Maker, Isabel wisely abstained from calculating results, or attempting to look into that future known only to the Father of Spirits. Her mental exercise, though a heart work, was only a simple committal of her all into His hands; and after this she was able to rise from her knees, not only strengthened, but comforted. She had no peace before, and she had felt sometimes as if her reason would give way; but now there were clearness and directness in her path, though thickly strewn with thorns; and if she must walk with bleeding feet, and walk alone, she was left in no doubt as to how and where she ought to tread.

This was the last great struggle on the part of the wife and mother. She had no after strife, only a deep-seated sorrow, which she hid whenever her husband was near, using all the influence she possessed, without being obtrusive or too urgent, to keep him steady to his purpose.

It was, perhaps, more difficult for Isabel to argue with effect on some of the points discussed, because she, like her husband, had been nurtured in the idea that a glorious death is no mean recompense for faithful service. Whenever her husband alluded, in the way of regret, to the particular kind of service he had undertaken, because the dangers it involved were of a mean and ignoble character, Isabel had to speak against the leanings of her own heart, and so managed as to convince herself, as well as him, that there is a glory higher than is celebrated by the acclamations of an admiring world in performing any act of service to mankind, simply because it is a duty; and thus that the patient investigator in the field of science, the unknown explorer in his solitary



wanderings, the man who unostentatiously devotes himself to the interests of his country, though never heard of by his fellow-men, is really as great a hero, and often as brave a man—nay, more brave really—than the soldier who fights his country's battles, and shares the shallow triumph of a victorious return.

All this Isabel had to preach faithfully and perseveringly, and she never shrank from her duty, nor allowed herself to faint under it. When great things have to be done great souls never faint. It is their distinctive merit, and that especially by which they may be known from little souls, that they always rise, and grow, and enlarge, in proportion to the magnitude of what they have to encounter.

Isabel had need for all her greatness of soul, for now the days flew past on rapid wing, moving ever more swiftly, as it seemed, to that one point of destiny beyond which she could see nothing yet. There was so much to be thought of and actually done, on her husband's part, in relation to his great undertaking; so much attendance in public offices, and so many consultations with public men; so much also of a confidential nature with which he was intrusted, that he had scarcely time to spare, scarcely power of thought at his command, for those home affairs which must all devolve upon his wife when he should be gone. Besides which, his home looked so secure and comfortable, his wife was so wise and prudent, that perhaps in the secret of his heart he did not consider much attention needed there. So the captain, when at home, glanced hurriedly over the few items for consideration which were laid before him, expressed his entire confidence in the good management of his wife, signed a few documents to which it was necessary that his name should be appended, and thus every thing, he thought, was made ready in that quarter.



The great question of life or death seemed scarcely to enter into the captain's calculations, so entirely was he occupied with business to be done. At the urgent remonstrance of the admiral he had just managed to make a will; and by doing that, and placing all his worldly affairs in the hands of a trustworthy solicitor, he felt that his duty as a husband and a father was discharged. Indeed, he could do nothing more. His wife was the best and the most competent woman in the world, and he was so pressed for time, and so busy—so busy, that almost every time any confidential matter was brought forward by Isabel to be discussed between them, it had to be put off to another opportunity. And yet the days flew past faster and faster, and he was going where it was scarcely possible that any communication should come from him to her, or that any letter of hers should find him in his distant wanderings.

Well, every man to his duty, and every woman to hers. Isabel saw distinctly what her sphere of duty was, and often upon her knees, when alone, she implored that help to discharge it aright, without which she felt that it would be impossible for her so much as to look into the future which now stretched before her. For already she began to experience some of its trials; already she began to taste some of its bitterness; already to know something even of its loneliness. Her husband was so occupied—it was right that he should be so; he was so abstracted from his domestic and social affairs, his thoughts so continually turned with their full force and weight in another direction—this also was right; but it cost Isabel many a tear and many a heartache, though without once blaming her husband, because she felt that all was right.

“To accomplish any thing well you must go heart and soul into it,” was Captain Grant's favorite maxim; and,



for a nature like his, it was a wise and true one. "All or nothing" seemed to be the motto of his life; and while his wife admired him for this, and felt in consequence that whatever he undertook would be executed faithfully and well, still, as already said, it left her somewhat lonely at a time when any earnest confidential communion with him would have been most consoling.

Alas for poor woman! she never has all the wants in a husband. She adores a manly man, and when she has got him she feels lonely. She longs for a man who will be her constant companion, always entering into her inner feelings, and sympathizing with her in her weaker moments; and when she has got *him* she despises him, and pines for a hero.

But Isabel was perfectly satisfied, though often sad. She would not have exchanged her manly, enterprising husband—not even one attribute of his noble character—for all the flattering attentions which could have been lavished on herself. Yes, she was fully satisfied. Her heart was rich in contentment, though just now sorely oppressed with care, whenever she sat down to think; only that, happily for her, almost all her thoughts and feelings were absorbed in the rapid approach of that one day of doom, and with the multitude of things which had to be considered and arranged before it should really come.

It came at last, however, in all its cruel force and bitterness, far exceeding what Isabel had anticipated beforehand. How it came, and how it left her—how the succeeding days and nights were passed, words would be powerless to describe. Many have gone through the same experience, and borne it heroically too—many less favorably circumstanced than Isabel; although, with regard to favorable circumstances, it availed little to her just then that she was surrounded by all which the world



calls enviable—wealth and luxury, the finest and rarest embellishments of taste and beauty, both of nature and art—faithful servants to do her bidding, power to command, influence to surround herself with friends—everything, in short, but one, the very life, and stay, and joy of her whole existence. So it is ever in this world. Those who possess most feel most the want of the *one* thing which they can not have.

There was nothing which Isabel dreaded so much, and shrunk from with such soreness of feeling, as people coming to condole with her. She did not want to be condoled with. Nothing had happened to her but what she had approved, consented to, and even invited—nothing, in fact, which she wished otherwise. So inappropriate, therefore, were all attempts at condolence, so far from reaching the centre of what was still her mighty grief, that in order more effectually to ward off such obtrusiveness, she began, as soon as it was possible for her to command the necessary power, to assume a kind of outward cheerfulness, which gave to casual observers the idea that she was a woman of little feeling—“so unmoved,” they said, “as they never could have imagined a young wife to be, under such circumstances.”

Indeed, remarks, according to all the accustomed varieties of misconception, were made upon Isabel's demeanor under this trial. By far the most emphatic were those of a peculiar, but not uncommon style of woman, to the effect that *they* would never have consented to being left; *their* husbands should not have gone without them; *they* would have followed a husband to the ends of the earth, and if he must die *they* would die with him. All very pretty when uttered by fair young lips, but not very much to the purpose where duty has to be considered, nor yet where a higher style of self-devotion than mere personal adhesion constitutes the one grand feature of female heroism.



The darkest and most melancholy portion of Isabel's present widowhood was the time which elapsed before the birth of her second child, an event which took place about three months after her husband's departure. This time her own recovery was tedious; but the child—a little daughter—was at first so extremely delicate and feeble, that to preserve the faint spark of life in its tender frame became the one absorbing object, both with the mother and with all concerned in the duties of the nursery.

It was, perhaps, a happy circumstance for Isabel that her thoughts were thus necessarily directed into a new channel, and that the anxieties of the passing moment thus obscured, in some measure, those which related to the future.

The child lived, though to prolong its existence up to maturity seemed likely to be a matter of almost as great difficulty as it had at first been to preserve it. Not that any definite disease assailed its tender frame, but, with unusual beauty and sweetness, it had brought into the world with it that exquisite fineness and delicacy of nature which require more than usual care in nurture and management. All this was good for the lonely mother—so closely do our blessings intermingle with our anxieties, even with what we are too much disposed to call our misfortunes.

Isabel became more solicitous now, from the additional claim upon her attention, to preserve her own health, and her various capabilities of mind and person. She had more to live for now; and, as time passed on, the calmness of a steady grief overspread her life like a silent flood, leaving fewer of its heights and depths perceptible, even to herself, excepting on particular occasions, when the old trouble became stirred by the apprehension of some fresh cause of uneasiness.



Perhaps the greatest cause for reasonable complaint with which Isabel was tried was the absence of all authentic information respecting her husband. Shortly after his first going out, letters had been received, with other intelligence ; but subsequently no tidings had come, and now there were not unfrequently paragraphs in the papers which startled her out of that placid equanimity and quiet trust which she was so anxious to maintain throughout the whole tenor of her life.

Instead of closing her eyes against all chance of receiving pain from such sources, Isabel read, and heard, and endeavored to find out, all that could be known of her husband's proceedings. Once she had reason to feel assured that a packet from him was on its way home ; but, on this precise occasion, a hurricane in some far-off region of the globe so nearly wrecked the vessel which was bringing home this treasure, that all was lost except a portion of the crew—all that was worth more than a thousand ships to her was gone down into those secret depths from whence no power of man, nor force of disturbing elements, could ever bring it forth again.

This was indeed a bitter, a cruel disappointment. People might well condole with the young wife under such a blow, and she bore their condolence better than she had done when her sorrow was new, and her heart was smarting under its first painful wound. She was learning, indeed, many lessons both of faith and patience ; and she learned them all with such a sweet resignation, almost amounting to cheerfulness, that still it was said of her at times, by those who never exercised the discipline of self-control themselves, " What a blessing it must be to take life as easily, and to be always as unmoved as Mrs. Grant !"

But there were those who knew very differently from this. Isabel was happy in having faithful and good



servants—she could not have endured any other—and they all learned to understand her quiet ways, and recognized, with many a sympathetic tone, and many a wise shake of the head, that deep under current of feeling which they knew to be flowing beneath the calm surface of her daily life.

By the conduct of these servants toward their mistress it would have been difficult to say whether they most revered or loved her. All her tastes were consulted, as well as her will obeyed; for Isabel took a personal interest in every thing about her home, so that no anticipation of her wishes, no faithful execution of her orders, ever went unobserved, or without its meed of cordial thanks and praise. Thus Isabel made around herself a little world, of which she was truly and in heart the queen. People said she ought to get away from home—to try the amusement of change of scene. The idea was revolting to her. The proposal was the only one suggested by well-meant kindness which she did not receive graciously. No; her home was her castle, her bower, her harbor of refuge. She would never leave it until she could hear that he was safe, or—

And Isabel never did leave her home, though years passed over, and rumors floated through the country that the ship had not been heard of since having been seen at a certain point of imminent danger. Oh! it was long to wait, and very sick at times grew the heart of the mother and the wife. If, however, she despaired, no such expression ever passed her lips—no listening to the evident despondency of others ever brought a cloud upon her brow, or a tear into her eye. Whether she had really, in the secret of her heart, that entire confidence in her husband's return which gave to all her actions the impress of faith, no one ever knew; but certainly she ordered all her household arrangements as if the master



might be expected home at any time, though the servants often went about the execution of her orders with doubtful glances toward each other, and ill-suppressed sighs, which indicated that they, at least, had lost all hope.

Steadily onward, then, without once flinching under the great burden of her duties, Isabel still went, paler and thinner—that was all. No neglect of her house or person ever indicated a carelessness of life, or any of its elegances; all order was maintained—all beauty preserved. The trees, as they grew—and how they had grown since he left!—were as carefully trained, and the grass kept as exquisitely smooth as ever. The green-houses were supplied as richly, even rare exotics sometimes added. Every thing, in short, was maintained in the highest possible perfection, not for her own sake, but in honor of her absent lord. Not for her own sake truly, for all seemed now to be hanging too awfully suspended upon that return, respecting which the world was beginning to be doubtful.

The third long summer of her loneliness had come and nearly gone, and Isabel was seated one day on the terrace when a letter was put into her hand. All foreign letters had shaken her dreadfully of late; but this— It was a short thin letter by the overland route. How should she ever command strength to open it?

Isabel broke the seal, but with such quivering fingers that the old butler who had brought the letter could not leave her quite alone, but stood at a little distance, sometimes dashing a tear from his eyes. At last he saw that his mistress, in a convulsive attitude, had let the letter drop. Her hands were clasped, and her eyes raised, as if in prayer. The old man approached, though unobtrusively.

“Oh, Williams!” his mistress exclaimed; and, looking



in her face, he saw at once how it was. Ever afterward he was accustomed to describe her countenance, as it looked just then, as being irradiated with a light from heaven. In another moment Isabel sprang to her feet; but she could not walk. Her knees gave way beneath her, and she would have sunk to the ground but for the supporting arm of the old servant.

"Williams," Isabel began again, "he is safe!"

"Thank God! for him and you," said the man.

"He is safe," continued Isabel, "and will be in Southampton in less than a week."

Isabel's powers entirely failed her after this. She became weak as a child, and sometimes wept like one, and sometimes laughed. But her self-possession and her strength were both restored before the arrival of her husband on the shore of his native land. It may well be supposed that he was not long in reaching his home. He did not find his wife seated on the terrace this time, but in her own room, where their first interview took place; and never was a happier meeting between man and wife.

On both sides there was much to tell. But the bronzed and time-worn-looking sailor had scarcely patience to hear. He wanted to hold all in his arms—to embrace all at once. Yet a modest consciousness seemed to hold him back, as if it were too much—too much for him—rough, weather-beaten man that he was—to own and claim for himself such an amount of happiness.

There is something almost awful in these sudden and abundant floods of joy, as if the blessing was greater than our nature could sustain. But yet that sense of awe only makes it deeper and holier. And when the father took his two children on his knees, and looked into the face of his wife, and saw that her calm beauty wore some sad traces of what she had been suffering, he



dashed a few tears from his eyes before he was able to tell her, as he did from his full heart, that whatever he had accomplished (and he believed he had done good service), or at whatever value it might be estimated by his country, he felt, and had felt through all his distant dangers, that he owed the glory of the enterprise to her calm bravery, her high principle, and her faithful love.

"Don't talk to me of the bravery of men," Captain Grant would often say in after years. "The glory we obtain abroad owes more than half its value to the quiet heroism of our wives at home."



## SELF-DEVOTION.

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### CHAPTER I.

ON the plea of distant relationship, Frank Osbourne, a promising young artist, was admitted as a frequent visitor within the domestic circle of the Pridhurst family. That circle was somewhat exclusive, and contracted; but the family residence being pleasantly situated within half an hour's journey by rail from London, it afforded a welcome change to run out in the fine summer evenings, when London is especially dusty, dull, and disagreeable. It is true the habits of the household were a little too precise for perfect enjoyment, especially those of the lady who was understood to govern the whole; but as there was a blooming circle of daughters without a brother, and consequently much disposed to be amused with the vagaries of this distant, and to them eccentric relation, it could not be a matter of indifference to Frank, who was always ready to be pleased, when he met the smiling welcomes of this bevy of young ladies after the toils of a long day spent without any female companionship, and often without any companionship at all.

Although possessing no brilliant attraction in the way of beauty, the young ladies of the Pridhurst family were artistically interesting to Frank, because, to his fancy, they represented so many nuns; so total was their ignorance of what constituted his world—so distant, whatever knowledge they possessed, from that which formed the basis of his favorite pursuits. Unquestionably they would have been considered, by most young men of his



standing, as somewhat dull and tame; but the fields, and orchards, and gardens about their residence were very pretty; the trees broad and shadowy; the meadows rich and soft; the cattle Paul Pottery; and the altogether perfectly irresistible; because there was always that secretly flattering welcome among the young ladies themselves which touched the susceptible heart of the artist in so lively a manner that he was often on the point of falling in love, only that he always went away sensible of a combined attraction from many sources, and thus found extreme difficulty in fixing his fancy upon one.

That which mere external attraction, however, never could have done, was brought about by very simple means. Frank, though a favored guest, was extremely liable to give offense to the lady of the house. He either turned up the corners of the hearthrug with his foot, or drew out a chair which she had just set aside, or rushed into the room unannounced, or committed some other breach of family order, which, but for his extreme good-humor and natural politeness, Mrs. Pridhurst would have found it difficult to pardon. The girls saw this, and were amused; some were even so mischievously inclined as to make matters worse. But there was one who always tried to make them better; one who never laughed to see her mother's frown as the visitor approached; one who often came forward quietly to rectify any inadvertent mistake; one who would meet the visitor in the garden as if by accident, and then lead him on to admire first a new rose, and then a carnation, until, as she hoped, the perfume of his last cigar would be so far diffused among the flower-beds as to escape her mother's keen perceptions. These little instances of genuine kindness (for it would be unjust to call them *arts*) carried the day with Frank; his heart surrendered, and the offer of



his hand, which followed quickly upon this event, was not refused.

To describe the astonishment of the whole household, when made acquainted with what had taken place between this imprudent couple, would be impossible; and, what was most surprising to Frank, the sisters, who had heretofore regarded him so complacently, were not the least severe in their exclamations against marrying a penniless, and, as they were pleased to call him, a friendless artist. The mother satisfied herself with treating the thing as impossible; while the father, who seldom ventured an opinion upon family matters when not certain of support from the higher power, grew strong here, and expressed himself with all that warmth and bitterness which little and down-trodden natures so much delight in, on occasions when they *dare* to be indignant.

Catherine Pridhurst, upon whom the artist's choice had fallen, was the oldest of the five daughters, already having attained the age of twenty-four, just one year on the wrong side of her lover's age. Partly because she was the oldest, and partly because of some hidden worth in her own character which a venerable aunt had discovered, she inherited a small bequest from this relative, which enabled her to act a little more independently than her sisters; and in a quiet manner, peculiar to herself, she declared her determination to pursue the dictates of her own heart in the matter of marriage.

All who knew Catherine knew perfectly well that, if once she formed a deliberate determination, she was not likely to relinquish her purpose; and thus it was that the engagement came at last to be recognized by the family, who still professed only to tolerate the alliance, while they continually predicted for her a future of poverty and degradation, with trials under which she must eventually sink.



Very quietly Catherine bore all this, and very steadily she carried on the preparations necessary for her change of circumstances. From the calmness of her general deportment some would have thought that she did not feel what her sisters and her parents were constantly endeavoring to make her feel. The fact is, that feelings can only be understood by calculating opposing weights and balances; and Catherine was all the while receiving a rich and abundant compensation in the passionate ardor of her now almost adoring lover, all which was so new to her, and yet so much like what she had sometimes dreamed of in the secret of her hidden heart, that it converted the whole world into another and a widely different universe to her, and so rendered exceedingly insignificant what might be taking place in the old.

It seems a little curious, but so it often happens nevertheless, that a man suddenly breaks out into this ardor of affection for a woman whom he has known for some time without being sensible that he loved her at all; but this was the less wonderful in the case of Frank Osbourne, because his whole being was made up of ardor, and impulse, and passion, and that sort of thing; so much so, that he fell in love with his own angels while he painted them, and quivered and shook with the passions he depicted, until often obliged to throw down his brushes, and rush out into the common street, or into the company of his acquaintances, where his imagination was soon disrobed both of charms and horrors.

If, in order to a happy union, it is necessary, as some persons suppose, for the parties to be very different, so that each may contribute to the joint stock of comfort what the other can not bring, according to this theory, there could scarcely be a more auspicious union than that which was celebrated in a very unostentatious manner between Frank Osbourne and Catherine Pridhurst.



Different as all their early associations had been, the difference was, perhaps, still greater in their natural and distinctive characters. Hitherto, however, no one knew exactly what the lady's character really was. In fact, she knew very little about it herself. Her life had been one of quiet routine, with few incidents to call forth either her feelings or her capabilities. Under a system of undeviating order and rigid discipline, she had learned to keep down whatever there might be of warmth, of energy, and especially of eccentricity in her own nature, and so to wear, on all occasions, that aspect of genteel uniformity which leaves but little to be said or thought of young ladies in general. The great question was yet to be solved—whether this was, indeed, *all* of which Catherine was capable, and *all* for which she had been called into existence. Sometimes she fancied it was not. Sometimes she had waking dreams, when strange thoughts would flit across her mind, like glancing sunbeams athwart a monotonous or gloomy landscape. But the little activity of thought and feeling which these visions called into life was soon subdued, and brought down to the level of that every-day routine which is no less influential upon personal and individual existence than upon the more public functions of official life.

Among the many vague impressions produced by these waking dreams we will speak only of one, as being the most definite and enduring. It consisted, chiefly, of a certain kind of heroic notion of the dignity as well as the beauty of self-devotion. Catherine had been brought to this way of thinking by many concurring circumstances, but chiefly by a certain want of loveliness in her mother's system of domestic rule and management. True, she had no very definite idea of the virtue of self-devotion for a man whose character was like her father's; but, as she had always intended to marry very different-



ly from her mother, so she had a secret habit of picturing in her own mind a domestic system which combined all the noble elements of the most interesting and beautiful self-devotion, brought into operation for the sake of one who should fully appreciate and richly reward the sacrifice. Nothing in the course of her reading ever thrilled the heart of Catherine Pridhurst like this combination of generous giving up on one side, and grateful reception on the other. It was the favorite employment of her hidden thoughts to sit in judgment upon how few women in general, and among her own acquaintances in particular, fulfilled this their highest mission upon earth; and while she thought of others, condemning much oftener than she approved, she determined that her own married course should be a perfect illustration of this her favorite theory, which she held by as tenaciously as by her religious faith, and perhaps a little more so.

It is scarcely necessary to state that in this her grand theory Catherine quite overlooked two or three very important facts, especially that of people not always *wanting* the offered sacrifice, and still more frequently exhibiting very little gratitude for it—sometimes even not perceiving it at all, except when forced upon their notice, and then hating it altogether, as a sort of debt incurred without their knowledge, which they might still be called upon to pay. These were conditions of her heroism which Catherine had never contemplated, but actually allowed herself to be led to the altar and married, under the full persuasion that the self-denying system upon which she was going to act would be as agreeable to her husband as admirable and praiseworthy in herself.

Raised above all inferior considerations by this noble idea, Catherine rather rejoiced than lamented over her husband's pecuniary circumstances, which, being some-



what limited, would afford her all the more frequent exercise of the virtue in which she intended to shine with no common lustre. For a wealthy man it would neither have been necessary nor becoming to deny herself the little luxuries and embellishments to which she had been accustomed; but here was a wide field open to her in which she might walk gracefully, though stripped of many external ornaments, her actions, if not her words, expressing at every step, "Behold, how much I give up, and endure for *you*!"

Then, again, the character of her husband Catherine imagined to be quite as well suited as his circumstances for the exercise of her beautiful theory, so warm-hearted, so generous, so capable of high thoughts and tender sentiments. How he would admire her as her system developed itself! and how that system would gradually work upon his own heart and life, so as to produce, almost insensibly, exactly the kind of good which his character most needed! So Catherine built her castles in the air, and viewed them from the distance, arrayed in all the light and glory of an atmosphere of her own creating; and no voice of experience whispered in her ear these few plain words: "My dear young woman, your theory may be very pretty for yourself, but it must be very odious to those on whom you practice it, because it presupposes them so selfish as to be always taking something from you for their own benefit, which you may possibly require even more than they do. Unless, then, you can so wrap up your self-sacrifice that they never find it, and unless you can adapt it at all times exactly to their tastes and wishes, you had better go on in the ordinary way, pleasing yourself and making yourself comfortable, and leaving others to do the same."

What jarring discord such language would have produced had it burst upon the ear of our devoted heroine!



But experience must be felt, not heard ; and so Catherine was preparing to discover for herself, not that self-devotion is not beautiful, is not a virtue, not even the highest virtue, but that, when deliberately set about as a means of commanding admiration or gratitude, it is as uncomfortable a virtue as any woman can well carry about with her. Catherine's great lesson of life was, then, yet to be learned. Let us see how it was taught.

The home to which Frank Osbourne took his bride, after a pleasant ramble in Wales, was one of those pretty little villas, so numerous in the outskirts of London, where every thing essential to a genteel residence may be found on the smallest possible scale. Coach-house, garden, lawn, conservatory—nothing was wanting. Frank was very fond of having beautiful things around him. The perfect taste with which he had filled up his miniature establishment was scarcely more to be admired than its completeness ; and the delight he naturally experienced in sketching and rambling through the loveliest scenery of Wales was at times interrupted by an almost boyish longing which came over him to fly back again to London, in order that he might experience the deeper enjoyment of introducing his bride to this little gem of a house ; for such, indeed, it was.

Frank had told his wife how very small the little villa was ; but, unfortunately, she had never in her life seen any thing habitable on a similar scale ; and, on first entering, she was so struck with the curiosity of the thing, that, instead of admiring the taste it displayed, she burst into a fit of laughter at its fairy-like proportions. She did not either contract her own dimensions as she might have done, but swept about in full sail, dragging off table-covers and deranging curtains, and laughing all the while ; so that it was impossible for her to perceive even the exquisite effect which Frank had contrived by the



opening of the drawing-room into a smaller apartment, in which were hung his favorite pictures, for which (he did not tell her) he had been obliged to borrow of a friend to purchase frames.

Frank Osbourne was peculiarly sensitive on points of this kind. In temper he was a very child, and required to be humored as one. Catherine had no idea of the mischief she had done; and, when her amusement a little abated, she really admired the choice and arrangement of every thing around her as much as any reasonable man could have desired. But the happy moment had passed by. A cloud came over her husband's face, which no good-humor on her part could dispel. He rang for the servant to show her up stairs, without going there himself; and then, turning into the little garden, lighted a cigar, and consoled himself with that.

During the course even of their honeymoon Catherine had detected symptoms of a kind of petulance on the part of her husband, a fault which she considered it would be one of her first duties to correct. What had happened to vex him now she could not possibly imagine; but, at all events, it was in this instance clear that she was the aggrieved party; for he knew how much she disliked that disagreeable habit of smoking, and it looked like nothing less than defiance to begin with it before they had been half an hour in their own house.

However, neither Catherine nor Frank had any real bitterness in their nature, and they had between them a solid foundation of love, which neither a cigar nor a fit of laughter could seriously affect. Frank was the more hasty and irritable of the two, but no human wrath was ever more easily appeased than his; and now, when his wife, really overcome by the many thoughtful arrangements she had discovered, which must have been intended especially for her comfort, came smiling into the gar-



den to him, and, despite the odious weed, drew her arm round his neck, and said with genuine feeling, "Really, this is a little paradise, Frank," he threw the remainder of his cigar over the garden wall, made room for her to sit down beside him, and then began, without a shadow on his brow, to show and describe to his wife so much that he had thought of and done preparatory to her coming, that, instead of making sacrifices, Catherine found herself, for that evening at least, in the position of one who has to receive more than any amount of gratitude can repay.

## CHAPTER II.

IT was a matter of amusement among his friends to see how wonderfully Frank Osbourne loved his wife. She was not a beautiful woman, though she could look extremely well. She had no contour of face or figure to fit her for a model in her husband's studio. In fact, her good looks were rather of that kind which demands a little care—care in the adjustment of dress, in the choice of colors, and in the arrangement especially of the hair. Catherine knew this, and she was studious of such matters, even to a marked nicety and precision, which, if she had remained unmarried a few years longer, would have been called old maidish. Especially was she studious about her hair, which well repaid the trouble of keeping in the most exact order. Her husband liked order too, but in a very different way. He liked the order of good taste and refinement—all such kinds of order as belong to symmetry and concord; but for the order of mere neatness he cared very little, especially when it interfered with his own impulsive mode of exhibiting whatever feeling might be uppermost at the moment. Thus the apartments he inhabited required a great deal of adjust-



ment after he had left them—sometimes, perhaps, a little more than his wife thought quite equitable as falling to her share of trouble.

Such as these were not, in fact, the kind of sacrifices which Catherine had contemplated; and as her husband's domestic circumstances did not admit of more than one servant being kept, the wife saw no reason why both partners in the matrimonial concern should not practice the same amount of self-restraint, and make the same efforts to meet the exigencies of every day. Catherine wanted nothing beyond what was fair and just; but she *did* want that; and, as she inherited something of her mother's turn for discipline in such matters, the domestic machine became a little difficult to adjust, so as to keep the wheels going always quite smoothly. The difficulty, however, as Catherine thought, lay entirely on the side of her husband. If he would only be reasonable, all would go well. "Ah! my dear madam, that is precisely what hundreds of wives are saying just at this moment, and their saying so does not make the case one whit better for themselves, only a good deal worse for their husbands."

Frank Osbourne very naturally cordially disliked this equalizing of the matrimonial balance. He had not married for that. He had married to have every thing put right again which he had made wrong; he had married to have perpetual sunshine in his home, his hearth always cheerful, his table well supplied, his wardrobe in order; and, above and beyond all, his wife always at leisure, and perfectly disposed to be caressed at any moment when the fit came upon him to fancy her particularly attractive or engaging. The least symptom on her part of abstraction, preoccupation, or, if such a thing could be conceived of, the shadow of a repulse, was enough to send him to the very antipodes of domestic



confidence and affection, from whence the return is not always so rapid as the going.

The first occasion of this kind which occurred was so slight that it would have been wholly imperceptible to a nature not extreme in its nervous susceptibility, like that of Frank Osbourne. He had lingered about his home, his garden, and his wife, one morning later than usual, before going to his studio, until at last reminded of the time by a loud knock at the front door. In the ardor of one of his impulsive fits of affection, he had rushed up stairs to take leave of his wife before the visitors should be ushered into the drawing-room, where she was hurriedly arranging the many papers, books, and other things which he had thrown out of place. If ever a wife might be excused for not being ready for a caress, Mrs. Osbourne might at that moment. Yet the caress came with more warmth than usual, and down went the whole fabric of that hair which she had so carefully adjusted, and which required so much time to rearrange. It was the work of a moment, for the steps of the visitors were already on the stairs; but there had been a frown and a push, on the part of the wife, which haunted the husband all day. It was the first time he had seen that expression on Catherine's face. It had come in the midst of his farewell kisses: would it ever come again? The thought was horror. It took all the beauty of his wife away, and all the sunshine of his home. Frank could not paint that day. There were images of loveliness around him, but they possessed no charm for him. He fell into a passion with the poor sitter who had been patiently waiting in his room for hours. He smoked desperately; and at last, throwing brushes and palette aside, he put on his hat, and went out in search of his friend Cleveland.

The painting upon which Frank Osbourne was en-



gaged was a favorite composition, which he was preparing for the next spring exhibition. It was one of those pictures which, by some indescribable charm, *may* happen to please the fancy, or it was nothing. Sometimes he persuaded himself it would create a great sensation—sometimes he lost both heart and hope, and but for the encouragement of his friends would have thrown it aside forever. Indeed, as an artist, Frank differed little from what he was as a man and a husband. Always quick and variable in his feelings, he was at one moment elated and confident, at another utterly desponding. And thus it was that the friends who most loved and valued him felt a constant care about how he might be getting on, and so went often to see his work, and to try to keep him up to any mark at which he might be aiming.

Among these friends there was none who had grown into so close an intimacy as Cleveland, of whom Catherine had heard so much from her husband that she grew a little tired of the name, and perhaps a little jealous of the influence which this unknown, and, to her, incomprehensible being exercised over him. For some time after her marriage Cleveland did not call at the villa. Frank said he hated women, and when his wife, upon this testimony, pronounced him a bear, Frank told her how high his position was in society, how well he was connected, and how much he might assume, if he chose, in the way of aristocratic bearing and pretensions; until poor Catherine began to fear that he was too great an acquaintance for her, and to dread his coming more than she had disliked the thought of it before. At this Frank would laugh, and talk of his friend's poverty, and the miserable expedients, as it seemed to her, by which he eked out a maintenance. But nobody cared for this, Frank said; Cleveland was a born gentleman. He had all sorts of influential and wealthy connections,



who could place him in any position he liked; and especially he had one patron whom he was always offending, but who valued him too highly not to be soon reconciled again.

Catherine had been curious with regard to the gentleman's calling or profession. That was difficult to explain, for he would do nothing but paint, and yet refused to practice this art in the ordinary way. His relative and patron, who professed to be an amateur in pictures, had for some years kept him occasionally occupied in copying. He had once even sent him to Rome, to copy for him there. "But," added Frank, with indignation borrowed from his friend, "the position of working as a mere copyist at the beck and bidding of a capricious old fellow like Sir George, is degrading to a nature such as Cleveland's, and one of these days I fancy we shall see that he has thrown off his chains."

Catherine ventured to suggest that there might be other employments found of a more independent nature, if the gentleman did not like that; but Frank rejected the idea. In fact, he said she could not understand the case at all. She must see Cleveland, and know him well, to be able to comprehend his character.

In process of time Catherine did see Cleveland; but she was not much the wiser for that, and certainly not better pleased. He might be a man well born and well connected; but he was far from making himself agreeable to her. He did not even try to do so; but directed the few abrupt remarks he made entirely to her husband, who, she considered, was most unreasonably amused with what, to her, had neither point nor charm. Catherine, however, was too amiable, and too sensible of what belonged to her position as a gentlewoman, to be otherwise than polite to her husband's friend; and the visit passed off without any further comment than a



quiet remark from Catherine, when the guest was gone, that perhaps she should like him better after a while.

“Yes,” exclaimed Frank, “it requires only that you should know him, and believe in him, and be quite yourself before him, and you will soon be the best friends in the world.”

Catherine rather thought not, but she said no more, and secretly pleasing herself with the idea that the dreaded visit was over, went about her accustomed duties with a lighter feeling than before. To her great surprise, however, Cleveland came again before a week had passed, quite unexpectedly on her part, to a “family dinner,” as her husband said, when he ushered his friend into the room. She felt rather annoyed at this, because of the one servant, and the necessity there was of sometimes having a family dinner, which, though good enough in itself, might not be quite such as she would like to spread before a guest; and, if this was to be the habit of the man, there would be no certainty of any day when he would *not* come. To her comfort Catherine found that her visitor cared little about his eating. What wine he drank appeared to be of more consequence to him; and Catherine, as a part of her heroic system of self-denial, had lately begun to do without wine upon the table every day. She resolutely declined taking any herself, even when it was there; and, strange to say, this little peculiarity of hers had the power of irritating her husband more than the display of many glaring faults, and certainly more than any self-indulgence would have done. He never would have cared what his wife ate or drank, nor how much money she spent upon herself; but this stupid abstemiousness, for the sake of economy, was a tacit censure upon him, and he hated the sight of her glass of water with nothing else, knowing as he did that she had been accustomed to wine all her life before.



But Catherine was firm in this, implicitly believing herself to be right. It was a part of that system which was dear to her very soul; and persuading herself that she had no other motive than her husband's good, she bore his consequent ill-humor as a portion of that suffering which it was so generous and noble to endure. Hitherto she had been able to do but little toward carrying out the grand scheme of her life, and that little had been far from producing the grateful reward which she had so fondly anticipated. She almost longed for the time to come when she could do more; and then some day, some happy day, she would tell her husband all, and he would see what a wife she was.

But, in the mean time, there was this Cleveland, whose presence in the house began to vex and irritate her; and as weeks passed on, and his visits became more frequent, they brought with them accumulated causes of vexation, which she found it very difficult to endure with a good grace. If only he could be got rid of—She had half a mind to affront him by doing something that he would understand, though her husband might not. She felt quite sure he was an idle fellow, or how could he find time to come so often, and to make their house a lounging-place? And then the cigars and the pale ale which both gentlemen consumed in a snug little room opening into the garden, which Frank had fitted up evidently for some such purpose! The expense, Catherine felt certain, must be very considerable, and such total waste! It was really quite a shame, when she had given up wine altogether, with some other little indulgences to which she had always been accustomed in her father's house.

Such were Catherine's thoughts as she sat alone in the drawing-room, hearing sometimes such peals of laughter from the room below, and such a constant hum of animated and cheery talk, that she could not help wonder-



ing how it was that Cleveland, who seemed to be talking fast enough now, could be so abrupt and taciturn as he always was with her. It must be true, as Frank had told her, that he hated women. Then why did he come there, and not keep to his bachelor's doings? She was growing very fast to hate him; and, feeling that, she began also to think it would be not only justifiable, but right to take some decisive step for the purpose of keeping him away—all *for her husband's good*. Catherine was careful about *that*. If she vexed her husband, if she deprived him of a favorite recreation, it was all for his good; and the anger she would have to endure was only a necessary part of her system of self-devotion. For this she even felt willing to give up for a while some portion of her husband's affection, which would indeed be the greatest of all kinds of giving up to her; but, if ultimately for his benefit, he would only love her the more in the end.

Catherine became very much strengthened in this way of thinking by one day finding, on returning home from church with her husband, that Cleveland had arrived during their absence, and was intending to spend the day with them. Frank was delighted, but Catherine gave the visitor her hand with even more reserve than usual. She was sure he could not have been to any place of worship, and, if such were his habits, he must be a very unfit person for her husband's friend. So it would be a righteous cause in which she would have to suffer while enduring her husband's displeasure about this man.

Yet all the while that these bitter thoughts were rankling in Catherine's mind, she was far from being guilty of any absolute breach of politeness to the unwelcome guest; so that Cleveland, who did not know her, and perhaps thought of her, if indeed he thought of her at all, as a cold sort of indifferent and uninteresting woman,



perceived nothing in her manner peculiarly repulsive, and was the less likely to be looking out for any thing of that kind because of the warm and cordial reception he always met with from the master of the house.

It was a habit of long standing with Cleveland, in all such matters, to consider only himself, and what made him comfortable for the time being. If the lady of the house had insisted upon no smoking, and no pale ale, he would have withdrawn himself in a short space of time. But otherwise he had a trick of sitting, and sitting, wherever he felt it easy and pleasant to sit, without considering whether it was possible for his sitting there to be an annoyance to any one. And with this habitual unconcern about every thing around him, beyond his own comfort or whim, he was continually, in some way or other, unconsciously deranging the household economy, or disturbing the personal convenience of others. Catherine never saw her rooms look half so forlorn and comfortless as when Cleveland had been there. It was perfectly amazing to her what crumbs he could scatter on the carpet, how he could twist the table-cloth out of its place, and especially how he could work up the covers of the chairs on which he sat. And then never to put any thing right again—never to apologize—never to take even the slightest notice of herself beyond a formal bow on entering or leaving the room. She had a right, she thought, to resent such conduct on her own account. But she would not do that. No, if she alone had been concerned, she would have borne all without a murmur. But her husband—she was bound to consider his good; and this man might, for any thing she knew to the contrary, be absolutely corrupting the morals of her husband. It was plain he never went to church—was no better than a heathen: common prudence dictated that he must be got rid of at any risk.



Here, then, was an opportunity—and a grand one, as it seemed to Catherine—for putting in practice her beautiful theory. Yes, she would martyr herself; for it would be nothing less to endure her husband's displeasure. It never occurred to her that there was an opposite course of martyrdom—to bear the society of her husband's friend. Catherine forgot, too, that to believe the man absolutely bad was to throw a very serious imputation upon her husband's character. She forgot many things which it might have been wise to remember, and so set herself against her husband's friend with all the bitterness of feeling of which she was capable; thus preparing herself, in the worst possible way, for an open declaration of her sentiments.

The opportunity for making this declaration occurred sooner than she had anticipated. It was impossible for Frank Osbourne to remain wholly unobservant of his wife's reserve and want of complacency when Cleveland was present; and one day he asked her good-humoredly and kindly, why she could not be half as pleasant—he required no more—to other people as she was to himself.

For the sake of woman's dignity we will not repeat all that Catherine found this a plea for saying. We will not describe how great she felt herself in her righteous indignation, nor how little she really was; how completely she spoiled her case by asserting ten times more than she could prove; and how she ended by having much the worst of it in this her first quarrel with her husband.

And a quarrel indeed it was. Frank Osbourne, passionate by nature, was wounded in this instance in the tenderest point. He was irritated, too, beyond all patient endurance, by several little taunting insinuations which Catherine had thrown out by way of relieving her



own mind. Above all, he was roused into absolute fury by the mention—the tearful mention—of her own acts of self-denial—*her* givings up, when he would give up nothing. How he detested the bare mention of these things, especially when thrown at him, as they were now, half in reproach, and half in self-admiration, let any one who has tried the experiment imagine for himself. Words can not describe the scene altogether, nor what it brought with it—least of all, what it took away. Tears alone afforded the wife a partial relief, while the husband sought his in a sudden and protracted absence from home.

Catherine thought he could scarcely be intending to return that night, so long did she sit waiting for him alone. When at last she heard the sound of his key in the door, she was conscious of a voice—it could be no other than Cleveland's—bidding a merry good-night, with many parting jokes, upon the steps. At last Frank came in, bringing with him a strong odor of tobacco, and looking a little more flushed than usual in the face. But there was nothing like pleasure there, not even the remains of a smile; rather a cloudy look, with an averted eye, which did not rest upon his wife, even when he spoke to her, which he was compelled to do once or twice. So the happy couple went up stairs to bed, where Frank either was, or pretended to be, asleep before his wife could begin to explain or expostulate. And so she, who had the worst of it, cried herself to sleep, as wives have done before, and as wives most likely will do to the end of time.

### CHAPTER III.

THE beautiful system which Catherine had laid down for herself, and which was to work such wonders in the



way of producing gratitude and affection, had certainly begun far from well; for though the first quarrel passed over without having any very serious consequences beyond that which is, indeed, sufficiently serious—the perpetual dread of a second—yet it was only by the wife giving up her point entirely, and promising to be courteous and kind to her husband's friend whenever he might come, that a sincere and total reconciliation was effected. Then, indeed, her husband was all affection and tenderness as before, promising so generously to forget and forgive, that, but for the tears that would rush into her eyes, Catherine could have laughed to think how entirely he regarded her as the offending party, when all the while—she was still quite sure of it in her own mind—she was the aggrieved one. At all events, she knew she was the sufferer. But then this was so different from the kind of suffering she had anticipated. She had expected to suffer as an angel; now she was suffering in some sort as a criminal. How could it be that her whole theory of conjugal life was thus overthrown?

Catherine pondered and puzzled over this question day and night. She was not an obstinate, nor determinedly blind woman; and therefore she hoped, with some reason, that some time or other light would come upon this most perplexing question. In the mean time she had enough to do; and blessed is that occupation—especially blessed if for those we love—which fills up the time with real duties, when the mind would otherwise be wandering after speculative ones, and the affections, it might be, putting out feelers in search of pain.

Yes, there was always enough to do in that small household, where the master was in the habit of bringing home other friends, as well as Cleveland; and though he had already begun to look very serious about the weekly bills of his wife's housekeeping, he was by no means



willing to submit to the least curtailment of that liberal hospitality which he gloried in, as well as thoroughly enjoyed; and Catherine, having early annoyed him so much about her own givings up, had unfortunately lost the power of making him listen to reason on these points. So the domestic wheels at times went rather heavily to the wife, being clogged with difficulties which she could see no possible way of removing.

By degrees, however, Catherine was now acquiring a habit of extreme care-taking, contriving, and almost pinching behind the scenes, really denying herself comforts for the sake of keeping up appearances, thus making her husband pleased with his table, and consequently with her. But all this seemed very unfair to one who liked justice. It wounded Catherine's sense of right, making her heart at times feel very sore: it was so different from the state of things she had contemplated. Here was she, toiling and suffering, and making sacrifices indeed—sacrifices of a nature which rendered it, in a certain sense, mean even to mention them. The worst of all was that her husband knew nothing about what she was doing, or giving up; and if she did but hint at the true state of the case, he flew in a passion directly, so that she had no chance of obtaining credit, or exciting gratitude, by what she did. What a total overthrow of her beautiful theory—of that system by which she was to come out so imposing in her generous heroism! All that she had intended should be great, was treated as if utterly mean; and all that she had expected to command the warmest love and admiration, seemed only to awaken anger and contempt.

But to one solid ground of comfort Catherine always returned. Her husband loved her, *that* was certain. He was fond of caressing her, liked to see her cheerful and well dressed, and would have her always about him



when at home. He told her every thing—at least, so it seemed; laid his heart bare before her; consulted her; asked her advice though he did not always take it; and, indeed, as the world goes, he might by comparison be said almost to dote upon his wife, except only on certain occasions when she happened to vex him, and that was always when she made a parade of what she suffered and endured for him.

It was altogether a delicate, as well as doubtful position in which Catherine stood—she had so much to lose, and apparently nothing to gain; but, as already said, she had enough to do. She had also naturally good spirits and good health to help her through. She had, besides, the pleasure of knowing that her husband was busily and pleasantly occupied. His picture was progressing successfully; and Catherine had not unfrequently the satisfaction of hearing it favorably spoken of by those who visited the studio. Cleveland was warm in his praises of it; and Catherine had never liked him so well as one day when he pointedly directed his encomiums upon the picture to herself, as if some natural impulse of a true heart had told him it was the most agreeable thing in the world to a woman to hear her husband praised.

Catherine often went and sat beside the happy artist while he was at work. She possessed no skill in art herself, but the subject of the picture affected her deeply. It was a widow and her infant child. Frank called it the "Legacy." To a mere connoisseur in art, the dark dress of the principal figure, and the general want of warmth in the coloring, spoiled the picture; but to those who looked long enough and thoughtfully enough to appreciate the feeling intended to be conveyed, it was a touching and beautiful scene, as full of tenderness as truth.



Catherine perhaps felt this the more that she was preparing for a little picture of her own, to be added to the domestic exhibition at the villa; and in these preparations, as well as in her husband's anticipations of success, she managed to make herself very happy upon the whole, in spite of those clouds of anxiety about ways and means which sometimes cast a shadow over her path.

The eventful day at length arrived when Frank Osbourne was to know the fate of his picture, so far, at least, as to its position in the rooms of the Royal Academy. Either the widow's black dress, or more probably the potency of other claims to the best places, decided the question—Frank's "Legacy" was hung *above the line*. His friends were indignant, he himself almost frantic; for there was more depending upon that picture than he had explained to any one.

In a fit of something bordering on madness, Frank Osbourne flew home to his wife, threw himself upon a low stool at her feet, and buried his face in her lap. Catherine could not conceive what had occurred, but by this time she had become so far accustomed to her husband's extravagant emotions as to be able to witness them without any painful alarm; so she did what was very natural under the circumstances—she tried softly and gently to draw away the flounce of her French *barége* dress, so that it should not be irrecoverably damaged by her husband's close pressure. Softly and gently as she tried to do this, however, he had the misfortune to feel it, and to understand what she was about. Suddenly tossing back his head, he looked her full in the face for a moment—the next he had started to his feet; and then, without a word, he rushed out of the house, and did not return until late in the evening.

"I wonder what I have done now," said Catherine,



in a state of blank astonishment, "and what can be the matter. Some remark upon his picture, I dare say, has annoyed him. As to me, I might surely take care of my dress, seeing it is the only respectable one I have to wear."

Upon the whole, Catherine did not make herself very unhappy on this occasion. She thought the storm would blow over, and certainly she experienced no feeling of self-condemnation to make her husband's displeasure more bitter to her. So she sat working very industriously at a little frock, which grew prettier every hour under her hands, sometimes even rounding itself out almost into the shape of a plump little baby, until her thoughts wandered pleasantly on to the young heart that would one day be beating within those muslin folds; and then she thought, too, how happy this little addition to their domestic interest would make her husband, and how patient!—for patience, she fancied, was the only thing wanting to render him the best of men.

In the midst of these agreeable occupations, both of hand and head, her husband came home, not flushed this evening, but looking very pale—pale and almost haggard, as if he had lived months since the previous day.

"Are you at liberty for a long talk to-night, Kate?" he said.

"Yes, quite," answered Catherine good-humoredly, for she knew by the use of that familiar name that her husband's displeasure with her was gone.

"Then lay down that work," he said.

"I was just finishing, and—"

"No, no; lay it down, or I won't say another word."

Catherine did as she was bid. It only made the difference of about ten minutes, so she quietly folded her hands, and prepared to listen.

Frank sat down opposite to her, and leaned both his



arms upon a small round table at which she had been working, so that he could look closely and steadily into the face of his wife.

"I have something to tell you," he said, in rather a choking voice—"something which, if I had been a just and honorable man, I should have told you before we married."

Catherine began to tremble a good deal, and her lips felt as if stiffening with a sudden frost. She begged him to go on—to be quick about it—to tell her all at once.

"It is about money," he said.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Catherine, and the blood came back to her face.

She now leaned her arms on the table too. She seemed not to care what her husband had to tell her now, her womanly fancy having, in all probability, been flying off to something so much more terrible than any calamity which money could possibly bring to her.

"I don't think you will ever forgive me," Frank began again, with a long-drawn breath.

"Try me," said his wife.

"Well, then, I was a very poor man when I asked you to marry me—poorer even than I cared to acknowledge to myself at the time. You knew I never kept any accounts, nor had the remotest idea of the expense of fitting up a house. Yet I wanted to bring you to a pretty home, and to make you feel that you had lost but little in the way of comfort by marrying me. So I borrowed—borrowed a good round sum of money, in the confidence that I should succeed in my profession, as everybody told me I should be sure to do. You know how I have worked at this picture—never so perseveringly at any thing in my life. You know, too, how my heart was set upon it. In fact, this picture was to be the making



of me. It was to bring me in orders more than I could execute, and, so soon as I could see my way clear before me, I was going to tell you all, for I should not have cared then. Now—now, you see— Oh, Kate, it is horrible to think of! Nobody will ever even see my picture, all owing to the meanness and spite of those fellows. By the way, I intend to show them up. Cleveland is going to write to the *Times*; but that is neither here nor there just now. The money is owing—it must be paid; and I have nothing to show as a plea for delay.”

“There is mine,” said Catherine; for her father had insisted upon her little fortune, if such it might be called, being settled upon herself. “There is mine,” she repeated, thinking her husband could not understand; and she said this in a prompt, clear, and straightforward manner, as if it was the simplest and the most likely thing in the world that her money should be so appropriated.

“Ah!” said Frank, in a perfect agony, “that is what I have been thinking. But what a mean and despicable fellow it makes of me, that I should furnish my house with borrowed money, and then come upon you for the payment.”

“I don’t see that at all,” said Catherine. “Is not the house mine as well as yours? I only wish you had told me sooner, that this load might have been taken off your mind. Oh, Frank, what a little matter this is between you and me! Never think twice about it, but get every thing paid to-morrow. I am so glad to know. I hope there is enough in the bank. Only think, to-morrow we shall be all right again—not a penny owing—not a cloud between us!”

“Do you really mean it?” said Frank. “Why, yes, I know you mean it; but do you really feel pleased, as



you say? Do you really mean that you think so little about giving up that money which was to be kept against a future day?"

"I mean every thing I say, Frank. I mean that I never was so happy in my life as I shall be to-morrow, when we get the money, and I see you go out to pay every farthing that we owe. And let us never run into debt again, Frank, as long as we live, whatever may happen to us."

Catherine expressed herself with so much candor and decision, and she looked so heartily and cheerfully in earnest, that no sooner had Frank become thoroughly convinced of her sincerity, than he gladly acceded to the only plan which remained available for the re-establishment of his honor and integrity. The next thing he did was to surrender himself, with all his accustomed facility of impression, to the happiness of feeling himself again a free and independent man; and just in proportion as these feelings animated and cheered him, his gratitude to his wife overflowed all bounds of moderation, and he poured into her astonished ear the eloquent language of an affection as unlimited in its warmth as in its admiration.

In the secret of her heart Catherine wondered exceedingly what all this could mean, and whence it had arisen. She had done nothing, suffered nothing, sacrificed nothing, that she was aware of, to justify such an amount of gratitude. She had been actuated only by a simple sense of right, and did not see how she could have done otherwise; for she was an upright, honorable woman, and with her feelings and principles it would have been absolute pain not to have obeyed the dictates of this sense of right. Again she was perplexed in her theory—utterly confused and puzzled with regard to all her preconceived notions of the virtue and the charm of



self-sacrifice. Why did her husband become angry and annoyed when she told him of what she had really given up, or suffered for his sake? And now, when she had given up nothing, and certainly suffered nothing, but simply done what was right, and gratified herself even more than him in doing it, why did he pour into her ear such language as this?—language pleasant enough in itself, but wholly inapplicable to the occasion, as it seemed to her.

Human life was becoming more and more a mystery to Catherine; and had she not been obliged, about this time, to study it under its more strictly physical aspect, she might have become bewildered in the mazes of its eccentric and often contradictory course.

Before the summer months were passed, Catherine had become the happy mother of a healthy and promising child—a little son, born to no great fortune in a pecuniary point of view, yet inheriting, as his more blessed birthright, as much affection as two warm and united hearts could bestow upon him.

The grateful feelings inspired by Catherine's conduct respecting the money, and the actual pleasure of having got rid of every debt, continued to keep Frank Osbourne in the best of humors until the birth of the little boy. Then indeed there was joy throughout the villa—a just and legitimate cause for making merry with his friends; and he invited them accordingly, with more extended hospitality than ever before.

Catherine grew frightened at the turn her husband's increased cheerfulness had taken. She herself was under the necessity of engaging additional help; but even with that she had enough to do to make all things work smoothly with such an increase of trouble consequent upon her husband's happiness.

To be freed from old debts is, with some men, only an



excuse for incurring new ones, and Frank Osbourne thought little of running up a bill—just “a mere nothing,” he said—here and there. Such things must be had, and really each one in itself was too trifling to cost a thought; besides which, an unexpected piece of good luck had fallen to his share. Before the closing of the exhibition his picture had been discovered and appreciated by the discerning eye of a stranger; and, beyond this, it had absolutely been bought. True, no other order followed, for it was less the skill of the painter than the pathos of the subject which had struck the stranger’s fancy, and thus he had taken it to his distant home, and probably had never thought of the painter again. However, this was something—a feather in Frank’s cap—an arrow in his quiver to shoot against despondency whenever it should attack his happiness again. But as to the household economy, which Catherine had to care for, it may be doubted whether the sale of the picture did not rather increase than diminish her anxieties in that department.

Indeed, before the winter of that year, things had begun to look rather cloudy and depressing in some aspects of life within the villa. Little carking household cares were pressing upon Catherine with great urgency. What to retain, and what to do without, was the question of every day. Fires were very expensive to keep up in so many rooms, and she thought it might be possible to economize in this item of outlay. The consequences would fall chiefly upon herself, and of that she must not speak. Indeed, she found it extremely difficult to reason with her husband at all on the subject of economy, because he began immediately to think she was harping upon the old string, and would consequently be reminding him of how her money had gone to pay his debts. Nothing could be farther from Catherine’s



thoughts than this; but the mischief she had done, in the first ordeal of her married life, by something too much like a parade of her sacrifices, was not to be remedied by any art or effort of hers now; and she had consequently a difficult path to tread—afraid, on the one hand, to go on as they were now, living beyond their means; and, on the other hand, afraid to bring upon herself those reproaches from her husband, which never came so bitterly as when they hinted at a meanness and selfishness on her part of which she was wholly incapable.

Here was indeed a difficult situation for a right-minded and true-hearted woman; but under this peculiar set of trials it was plain to Catherine that no human help could avail her. She could not even ask for human sympathy. To no one but her husband would it be justifiable to open her lips on these subjects, and to him her lips must now be closed. How was it that, while pursuing this narrow and difficult walk, Catherine was far from being either melancholy or desponding? Her cheerfulness was sometimes a wonder to herself. One secret of her cheerfulness was in her lovely child, and in all she had to do for him; another, in those evidences of her husband's affection, which he never withheld except under some momentary fit of irritation; and, beyond all, Catherine was practically unraveling that mystery which, as a mere theory, she would never have been able to comprehend.

Whether from the actual and faithful discharge of her womanly duties—whether from the necessity of thinking so much for others as often most effectually to forget herself—perhaps from many causes combined, and certainly not least from the happiness diffused around her by the growing interest attaching to her child—Catherine certainly began, from this period, to practice much more actual self-denial than before, and yet to think



much less about it. To her it seemed only that want of time precluded the possibility of making any calculations on these points. What she had to do must actually be done; and as the landscape, under the diffusion of the sun's rays, will suddenly assume a new aspect, sometimes without the beholder being exactly conscious how or why, so her character was becoming more lovely by the discipline of circumstances, without any consciousness on her part that it was improving.

The one great point which Catherine seemed now to set about, in an earnest and hearty manner, to make every one around her as comfortable as possible. Things had arrived at such a pass that she actually could not afford many fires, nor, indeed, much company. For the first piece of economy she cheerfully compounded by allowing, what she had once thought impossible—smoking in the drawing-room; and she managed this so good-humoredly, that her husband thought she really enjoyed it. Whether his friend Cleveland was equally deceived remains to be shown. With regard to company, Catherine fancied that Cleveland really supported her; for he adopted a happy method of persuading Frank that company was a bore, and that nothing was so pleasant as to sit over the winter's fire alone with him; and Catherine encroached a little on her part too, which made the whole arrangement more equal. For want of that additional help which she was now trying to do without, she was compelled to take a large share of the care of her baby herself; and thus a very elegant little cot stood in a corner beside the drawing-room fire, with the little unconscious intruder generally fast asleep when her husband came up from dinner. By these arrangements two fires were spared; and, instead of enduring the privation as a calamity, Catherine would laughingly make much of her own infringement of the drawing-room etiquette,



in order to make the gentlemen more at ease on account of theirs.

Although Cleveland was still a frequent guest, Catherine did not mind him as formerly. Once having overcome her prejudices so as to *try* to think kindly of him, his whole character assumed in her eyes a different aspect. True she thought him indolent—wished he was better employed; but, as regarded themselves, he had the art of fitting into their little establishment so unobtrusively; and now that they were better acquainted, and he conversed more freely before her, she found him sometimes such really good company, that she would have been sorry to lose him entirely from their little circle.

About this time Catherine observed a difference, which she could not have described, in Cleveland's manner toward herself. Sometimes he seemed to be regarding her attentively while not conversing; but his look was not impertinent nor bold—rather inquiring and earnest. Sometimes she even found, to her surprise, that he had perceived the exact opportunity for doing her some little service, which he performed with an air of the utmost unconcern, but which, at the same time, Catherine knew that her husband would never have seen that she needed. Catherine smiled on these occasions—a happy, grateful smile—for it is so sweet to be understood and met in our little emergencies of every day. Cleveland, however, never seemed to notice Catherine's grateful smile; nor was she hurt that, by the time she looked up to thank him, he had usually turned his head another way. Indeed, she rather preferred not coming under his pointed or immediate notice, so long as he had good will enough to do her such little services as few women can ask, but which, at the same time, all women are glad to receive.

In the midst of all her troubles Catherine was now be-



ginning to feel very much like a happy woman, so cleverly had she managed, without offending any one, to bring her household expenses within the desired limits, when a change came over the aspect of her life, which threatened to throw some of its brightest promises into shade. The child—that cherub child, sent, as it seemed to Catherine, with a cherub’s message to teach the hearts of his parents to rejoice, and trust in Him who gave the blessing—the little healthy, happy fellow was attacked with symptoms of inflammation of the lungs. In the midst of his laughing and crowing there came a cough, a sharp pain, and then a cry that went to the mother’s heart; and she was wondering what it would be best to do, when her husband and Cleveland entered the room.

Frank Osbourne did not at first believe that any thing was the matter, but snatched up the child, and began to toss him as usual, expecting his accustomed merry laugh, when he shrieked again, and then coughed long and painfully, with intervals of moaning, and an expression on his little face too plainly indicative of some unusual suffering.

“Put him in a warm bath,” said Cleveland hastily.

“Would you?” asked Catherine.

“By all means,” he answered, “and as quickly as you can. There is nothing like it; only be very careful, or you will frighten him, and then he will scream, and that is the worst thing he can do.”

“Why, Cleveland,” exclaimed Frank, perfectly helpless and astonished. He was going to say, “What do you know about children?” But Cleveland was gone. The rapid closing of the front door after him was all they heard; nor did they even suspect what had taken him away, so earnestly were they occupied about the child, until the arrival of their family doctor convinced them that he had hastened away to do the best and the kindest service for them all.



Catherine had no thoughts just then for any thing beyond her child; but when, in the course of a few hours, the symptoms had somewhat abated, and the doctor took his leave with a few encouraging words, she thought of the kind and judicious part which Cleveland had acted; for her heart was comparatively at peace then, and so full of gratitude that she longed to express herself to her husband's friend in warmer terms than she had ever addressed to him before. But he did not come to receive her thanks; only about ten o'clock he rang slightly at the bell, and when the servant went, he just put in his head for a moment at the door, asked how the child was going on, and then went away without another word.

If Frank Osbourne was difficult to convince that his child was really ill, he was only the more extreme in his distress when the truth rushed upon him, as it did with overwhelming force. Indeed, his agitation and distress were such as to frustrate his purpose when assisting to carry out the doctor's directions. Still Catherine liked that he should be near her, and she bore with the utmost patience all the mistakes he made in snatching at the wrong thing, or meddling where he ought to have been quiet; until at last, when the care of two watchers seemed absolutely unnecessary, she persuaded him to lie down on the sofa, where he soon fell fast asleep; and the mother had then her watching and her thoughts to herself.

What was the nature of those thoughts who shall describe, or who shall set limits to what they comprehended of the past and the future in those fleeting moments of present time? Years of mental experience are sometimes crowded into the space of a few hours; and so it might be with that wakeful mother, as she sat there listening to the breathings of her child.



We read of the Arctic voyagers remaining sometimes for days and weeks enveloped in impenetrable mist, through which they still pursue their dubious way, unconscious of what actually lies around them. Fain would they look before them, or on either side, for they fancy this headland or that shore must be immediately in their course; but all is uncertainty, a dim blank world to them, which yet may be pregnant with the utmost peril, or the most cheering hope. On, and on they go—cautiously, but still advancing—when suddenly, as if by enchantment, the misty veil is lifted, and they see the vast world before them; the sky, the coast, the distant mountains, the happy-omened outlet, or, it may be, the icy barrier through which it is impossible to pass.

It is even so at different stages of our individual experience. The sudden arresting of some accustomed flow of feeling—the suspension of a life dear as our own—the night of watching by the sick—and, not unfrequently, that silent converse with nature which is held in lonely wanderings among her loveliest or sublimest scenes—in any of these moments that veil may be uplifted which reveals, in all its nearness, reality, and truth, what we had been only dreaming of before, and sometimes what had never even entered into our dreams. That the veil will fall again as suddenly as it was lifted up, is no excuse for after deviations from the course which we then saw was the only right one to be pursued. We *did* see then; and because we did, we can never again draw over our convictions that cloak of ignorance which, up to that time, we had worn.

The morning of the day when it seemed, in all human probability, that her child would be saved, found Catherine a wiser and a better woman. She did not know this herself, still less could she have told how or why the change had come. She had no theory—no system



now. The change wrought in her character, and which for some time had been creeping on, was a practical one. She had been doing, rather than thinking. She had been doing what was positive and immediate, rather than thinking of what was abstract and distant. She could not, however, have said *what* she had done, because she kept no account now of debtor and creditor in the way of serving, suffering, or giving up. Indeed, suffering, as belonging to herself, never entered into her calculations. She only knew that she felt happy when every one around her was so, and when things generally went right. If people were not happy, she must try and make them so: and if things were not going right, she must work them round as well as she could. This was all she had been conscious of, in the way of duty, for a good while. But now this solemn night, first of awe and trembling, then of meditation, prayer, and faith, and lastly, of blessed hope—this one night, though the dim morning found her with tears upon her cheek—this night, with its uplifting of the earthly veil, seemed to have shown her that she was nearer, than she could otherwise have believed herself, to that peace and rest which result from committing every thing, without reserve, into the hands of Him who has a right to call back any blessing he may choose, because he has himself bestowed all.

And Catherine had passed through this, the searching trial of surrender, which might yet have to come upon her with all its fiery power. But even this could never, in the future, affect her now as it would have done before that solemn night. She had seen, by the lifting of the veil, such light upon the distant hills, such clear shining of the sun above the mist, such still waters in the far ocean toward which her little bark was steering, and such a perfect marking out of the simple course she was to pursue, that never could the closing in of clouds or



vapors, or even of thick darkness, make her doubt again as to the realities which she had seen.

Thus, then, it was that Catherine thought and felt when the light of morning broke into that close and shrouded room. She was like one who had seen blessed visions; and she asked not how soon such visions grow dull upon the memory, nor how often they need to be renewed, in order to keep alive our sinking faith. For this they come again sometimes with our afflictions—come mercifully even then; and sometimes they come with our enjoyments—with the quick happiness which startles us by its abundance, when it bursts like living water from the rock, or wells up around our feet amid the desert sands.

#### CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE and novel scene was now presented by the interior of the villa—three human beings of mature age and experience apparently all wrapped up in a little life which seemed almost as fragile as that of the butterfly. That the parents should surrender themselves to this strong instinct was no wonder; but Cleveland, that strange, selfish, inconsiderate man, seemed absolutely to think as much of the boy as if he had been his own. And Catherine—oh, how her heart did thank and bless him for this! though she found no language in which to express her gratitude, and perhaps he would have turned a deaf ear to her if she had.

After a hard struggle for so frail a creature, the victory was won at last. Every unfavorable symptom disappeared, and the little helpless form lay free from pain, and slept the happy sleep of returning health. All things in time returned to their accustomed course, although no individual of that little circle felt exactly the



same. For the first time, when the child was brought into the drawing-room, all seemed at liberty to be merry again. The gentlemen lighted their cigars; Catherine took out her work. And now they could talk over the news of the day, the sayings and doings of their friends, the occupations of the studio, or whatever might have any passing interest. Once or twice, while this conversation was going on, Catherine started to hear a little cough from within the cot beside the fire. Each time she rose from her seat, put her head down, and listened to the breathing of the child.

"It is the smoke," she said to herself; "but I will not mention it. They will soon have finished."

On returning to her seat, Catherine's eye caught a peculiar expression on Cleveland's face. He gave her a nod of recognition, as if thinking exactly the same thoughts with herself, and immediately threw his cigar into the fire. Without a word he took Frank's from his fingers, and did the same with that.

"Come, come," said Frank, "what are you about?" for he was more obtuse than his friend on some points.

"We are making that little fellow cough. Don't you hear?" said Cleveland.

"Why, Katey!" exclaimed Frank, springing up, and closing the box of cigars which he had opened for the especial enjoyment of that evening, "why did you not tell us?"

"There was no need," said Catherine, looking at Cleveland. "I had such a good friend here;" and without a moment's thought of what she was doing, she laid her hand upon his arm and said, "Poor Benedict! I wish you had a good wife of your own, and a little boy like ours."

Had Catherine looked into Cleveland's face, without a certain mist that *would* come into her own eyes, she



might have seen that this little hasty speech of hers had made him very uncomfortable. But she was too thankful—too happy to notice any thing but his considerate kindness. And then her next thought was how to make up, both to her husband and him, for what they were denying themselves. An idea struck her. She ran down into her kitchen, sent out for something they both liked for supper, and, after keeping up a lively conversation until it was ready, ate of it so heartily herself as to make them both believe that it was for her own sake, quite as much as theirs, this addition to their accustomed indulgence had been made.

The boy coughed no more that night, and Catherine retired to rest more happy than any one would have believed possible who could have witnessed her recent sorrow. Why should she not be happy? Her child was restored to her again; there was not a cloud between her husband and herself; she had found a friend in his friend, and had learned to love and trust where she had recently felt almost determined to suspect and hate.

“What injustice I have done him!” was Catherine’s mental exclamation as often as she thought of Cleveland; and, under the influence of this conviction, she experienced a constantly-recurring impulse to be more than usually attentive and kind to the man whom her thoughts had wronged. This impulse, however, she mostly succeeded in restraining; for there was that about her husband’s friend which tended always, more or less, to keep women at a distance. No woman, in fact, could have felt sure that her attentions were agreeable to one who, whether justly or not, had obtained the credit of caring only for himself. Catherine, on a slight acquaintance, had rushed to this conclusion; but she had lately learned to think it possible that abstraction might not be self-absorption; and when Cleveland sat beside her, moody



and silent, as he often did, she felt by no means certain that his thoughts were centred in himself. Once, indeed, he surprised her by asking suddenly if she knew the story of Griselda.

"To be sure," she answered. "All women are made acquainted with that model of patience. The lesson was taught me in my childhood."

"I should suppose so," observed Cleveland.

"Why?"

"You seem to have learned it so well."

"I!"

"Yes, you."

"I can not imagine what you mean. I am not tried, you see, like poor Griselda, and I fear I should sadly want her patience if I were."

"It seems to me you *are* tried though, and I often wonder what is to be the end of it."

"I can not understand you. Why, I am *almost* the happiest woman in existence."

"Yes, Katey, because you are *almost* the best. May I call you Katey?"

"No; that is the name my husband calls me. But you may call me Catherine if you like, and if you will acknowledge me as a sister, and be a good bachelor uncle to my boy, and leave him a fortune."

"I will be his bachelor uncle gladly; but as to the fortune—"

"Well, now, Cleveland, I will be equal with you. You have been thinking about me, it seems, very unnecessarily, and I have been thinking about you."

"Quite as unnecessarily, I dare say."

"No, no, I won't allow that. I have been thinking very much to the purpose, and altogether for your good. But first I want to know one thing, if you won't consider that I am making too free."



"I don't think I shall. What is it?"

"I want to know what—in short, I *must* say it, and you *must* forgive me—what are your prospects in life?"

"Heaven help me! what a question!"

"Heaven, you know, helps those who help themselves."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if I were a man I would *be* a man. I would do something worthy of a man."

"You mean if you were a great, idle, stupid fellow, wanting only to smoke and eat, you would not hang about a little paradise like this, where you had no right to pollute the air, and to take the children's bread out of their mouths."

"I don't mean any such thing, Cleveland, and you know that I don't. There is nothing in me—I may say so much for myself surely—there is nothing in me—there never can be any thing to justify such a conclusion. I am not mean, Cleveland, nor stingy—you know I am not."

"Yes, Catherine, I know that almost to my cost. If you had been mean—nay, if you had not been more noble, and forbearing, and generous than any other woman—I should have gone away somewhere, and not remained a hanger-on here, where you have a right to be tired of seeing me."

"Come, Cleveland, we won't talk in that way. It is beneath us both. There is something widely different from that, which I have long wanted to say to you, and no opportunity can be better than the present; for my husband will be late to-day, and I want to talk to you alone."

A pure womanly and wifish feeling enabled Catherine to say this, as alone it could be said with perfect safety, gravely, and with her eyes cast down. She knew just



then that she was blushing deeply, for the step she was about to take seemed a bold one; and had she looked up, there would have been that expression in her eyes which is always deepened and intensified by the act of blushing. Had she smiled, too, while looking up—and she had the sweetest of smiles, peculiarly her own, set off by the whitest of pearly teeth—the man whom she wanted so much to talk to about himself might have been tempted to think only of her, and that would have spoiled all. Women understand all this by instinct: it is of no use pretending that they don't. Hence that power which some have the wickedness to exercise where they ought not, but which others have the virtue to suppress.

Catherine was of the latter class. Not for worlds would she have violated by word or look—not even by the minutest fraction of a smile—the sacredness of her allegiance to her husband, who still was far from understanding her, or knowing half her worth. She therefore went on, without once looking up while the blush remained upon her cheek, talking rapidly, with the utmost directness, and with so little reference to herself or others that the man whom she addressed might have been the only being in the world. The practical tendency of what she said was to stir him up to be something, to do something, to act worthily of himself, and so to become a better and a happier man.

Cleveland bore all that Catherine said with a patient submission, which affected her deeply. He rose from his seat, and then, placing himself by the fire, stood leaning forward with his head bent down, as if penetrated through every nerve and fibre of his frame by the force of the simple words to which he was listening. At last, when Catherine ceased, Cleveland returned to his seat, and, looking her steadily in the face, said, in a voice



which trembled as she had never heard it before, "You don't know all, my good monitress. May I tell you something?"

"Yes, every thing," replied Catherine.

"Well, then," he began, "I was unlucky from my birth, because I had family distinction, and good connections, and all that people call *advantages*, with nothing to live upon except pride for the present and expectations for the future. My mother died when I was in my cradle. Would that I had died with her! I had no female acquaintance but a nurse. No ladies visited at our house. My father speculated, and lost what little property he had. Then I became a burden to him—a mere hanger-on, you see, always. I saw it, read it in my father's every act and look; and yet he had never had me trained to any business or profession. I wish I had been a shoeblack, or a groom. There was but one thing I could do, he said—I could marry. So I was dragged into society. They said I was good-looking then. I must have been something rather extraordinary, or the women were great fools; for more than one—but that is nothing to the purpose. There was one especially upon whom my father's heart was set. We wanted money, and her father wanted a lift in the way of good connections. So the match was made between the parents on both sides, and we were married. My wife!—Good heavens! that I should call her so! She was the only woman with whom I ever was intimately acquainted until I saw you. Pardon me the mention of her in the same sentence with yourself. A mean-spirited, selfish, coarse, and heartless man is bad enough; but a woman! Well, we soon hated one another cordially, unalterably, and we separated. She went her way, and I went mine, only that I had literally no way to go; for I gave up every thing to her, on condition that she gave



me back my name, and did not bear it about with her to France, or Italy, or wherever she might choose to go."

"And where is she now?" asked Catherine, woman-like.

"I don't know. I care less. I would not listen to any one who should be inclined to tell me."

"Perhaps she is altered."

"Not to me."

"Ah! Cleveland, did you ever try to make her better?"

"To my certain knowledge I never did."

"Then what could you expect?"

"I expected very little in the way of happiness, but I found even less than I looked for."

"She had been badly brought up."

"She was made of bad materials."

"I don't believe that altogether."

"You would have believed it in her case."

"No, I should never believe it, unless you had tried to improve her—tried kindly, and patiently, and long, and had failed at last."

"That proof I certainly am unable to bring to show the truth of what I say. But let us talk of something else; it curdles my blood to think of that woman."

"Oh, Cleveland! how unjust, how cruel you have been! But, as you say, let us talk of something else. Only I feel so disappointed in you. Why, I had begun to think you the kindest of men. I am sure you have a kind heart, after all."

"Behold, then, what a selfish, mean-spirited woman can do with such a heart—sear it, poison it, murder it, make a man loathe himself even more than he hates the cause of his misery and degradation! Oh, Catherine, you do not know the power that belongs to you as women!"

"And yet it seems to me that man, as the stronger,



ought to bear the most important part in the domestic concern, rather rectifying what is wrong in the woman, than expecting her to make him right."

"One would think so, if God had not clearly ordained it otherwise. There is a great mystery in all these matters."

"There is; but don't talk to me of mystery. I have had enough of that. Happily, some things are clear enough, if we will but see them. One of the best of these clear certainties is, that yonder stands my blessed husband at the garden gate. So now we will have dinner if you please."

With which conclusion Catherine ran down into the hall to meet her husband first, and then to hasten every preparation for his comfort and enjoyment.

Catherine tried very much that day to be as cheerful as usual, or even more so; but every now and then a thoughtful mood took possession of her, and a visible anxiety overshadowed her face. Her husband was very much absorbed in some business which had occupied him that day; so much so, indeed, as not to observe that Cleveland also was far from being an attentive listener to his long and circumstantial description of what had been taking place. As the evening passed on, however, each member of the little party wore his accustomed look. There was no smoking in the drawing-room now. There never had been since the child was ill. Cleveland protested against it as a barbarism, and Frank would have been ashamed to smoke alone.

Catherine, feeling gratefully that this giving up was chiefly on her account, considered herself doubly bound to contribute her whole share to the cheerfulness of the evening hours; and, assisted by a thankful heart, and genuine good will, she discovered powers of conversational amusement in herself which she had never been aware of before.



The child helped her too. He had a fancy now that he would not sleep in such good company ; so, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, he sat upon his mother's knee, playing off with great success all the little tricks which Cleveland was so clever in teaching him.

"Remember," said Catherine, as she bade good-night to the guest, when at a late hour he prepared to depart—"remember, you are now the adopted uncle of this boy ; and you will be sure to leave him a fortune, won't you ?"

"I must make it first," said Cleveland.

"We shall see," were the last words he heard from Catherine ; but he fancied they were uttered in a peculiar tone, and might have reference to some passages in their previous conversation.

## CHAPTER V.

ALTHOUGH the domestic economy of the villa was now conducted on a safer and more prudent plan than formerly, yet neither the safety nor the prudence had any warrant for security, because there was wanting to their certain permanence a perfect understanding between the master and the mistress of the house. It was entirely by Catherine's skill and good management, by taxing her powers of invention beyond all moderate bounds, and by constant giving up, with much patient endurance on her part, that any thing like a comfortable adaptation of means to ends could be attained.

Such a state of things was not calculated to last ; nor was it right that it should last. Catherine herself felt this, and the only great wish of her heart which now remained unsatisfied was, that her husband could be brought to understand the real state of things at home without her telling him. In fact, they were not working togeth-



er; and, until this could be brought about, there could be no certainty that they might not at any moment be working against each other; not from opposition, but from pure ignorance on one hand; and a knowledge, on the other, which the one who was the most concerned in it was still unable to communicate.

“What is to help a woman thus circumstanced? What, or who,” said Catherine to herself, “except that kind Father in heaven who sees and knows it all?”

So she worked on—worked and prayed, and never calculated how long it would be before the happy issue out of all this trouble would come; nor took account of the chances of its never coming at all, nor of what she had herself to do and suffer in the mean time; but worked and prayed, and took each day’s duties as they came, and made herself a very happy woman, notwithstanding the disproportionate domestic burden which she had to bear.

It was impossible that Catherine should be so far raised above human weakness as not to be consoled, under this one trouble, by the constant evidences she was now receiving that, if her husband was blind to her true situation, his friend was not. There is something so pleasant in having our little untold sacrifices known and appreciated—something so gratifying in having the best parts of our characters and actions observed and valued at their true worth, that Catherine had more than once to rouse herself, and set her face resolutely against the temptation to speak of these things to Cleveland; and, when he noticed them, to let him know how truly grateful she was for his consideration. Happily for her, she was checked in this by the startling idea that, in so doing, she would be confiding in a man who was not her husband on points which exclusively concerned her husband and herself.



So Catherine refrained most scrupulously and entirely from talking too intimately about herself in all her private interviews with Cleveland. A married woman, she considered, has no separate self; and therefore she can have no self to be talked about confidingly with any man but her husband.

It would have been easy, in Catherine's case, to find excuses for yielding to this temptation; for it was evident that Cleveland now saw much which he either would not or could not see in the earlier stages of their acquaintance. He had not believed in *any* woman then; but so soon as he believed, he understood; and, with his naturally quick apprehension of motives and characters, there was added to his knowledge a deep sympathy, now for the first time called forth on behalf of the female sharer in the domestic burden. And, with all this, he could be so gentle and unobtrusive, when his best feelings were roused into exercise—not impulsive, ill-timed, and extravagant, like his friend, Frank Osbourne, but tender, watchful, and most appropriate in all his kind attentions.

But now there was a great duty which Catherine had to discharge, which often occupied her anxious thoughts, but which she took upon herself, alike without hesitation, and without presumption. It related to her husband's friend. She called him *her* friend now; and loving him, as she had lately learned to do, the duty must be done. This simple *must* was present with her night and day, unattended still by any calculations about means or consequences. She had a clear view of that which ought to be, and she must do her part toward bringing it about. So one day, when Cleveland was seated beside her, she began. She had grown bolder now; she did not blush at all, but looked steadily in the face of her friend, while she said—



"Cleveland, have you ever thought of going out to settle in a new colony—in Australia, for instance?"

Cleveland started up from his seat.

"You must be a witch, Catherine," he said, "to have divined what was in my thoughts. Why, that is the very subject I wanted to talk to you about, only I have put off from day to day, glad of any excuse that kept me here, yet certain all the time that you would bid me go."

"I think, if I were you, I would go," said Catherine.

"Would you?"

"Yes. You know you are peculiarly circumstanced—peculiarly constituted. Old associations must be constantly jarring against your nerves while you remain here."

"Yet some associations are very dear."

"Take them with you as a private store of comfort. But you *must* work—indeed you must. Life is not worthy the pain it costs as you are living."

"I know it, I feel it. No one can hate this idleness more than I do myself. But what can I do there, where you would send me?"

"Oh! I am certain you have powers, energies, resources within you, that would spring up to your own astonishment. And then you would be so happy."

"Don't talk in that way, Catherine. For mercy's sake, leave the happiness out of the question."

"No, I won't. I am quite sure you will be a happy man yet, Cleveland, if only you will work; and—there is something else you must do besides."

"What is that?"

"You must pray."

"What if I have done that already?"

"Then I thank God for you from the bottom of my heart, and am sure that all will yet go well."

"Tell me one thing, Catherine."



"I will tell you any thing that I ought to tell."

"Well, then, say truly—has this idea come across your mind as a matter of right on my own account, or—or—I hardly know how to express it—or, in short, because you think it better for Frank and you that I should be got out of the way?"

"Ah! Cleveland, you don't know what it is to have a friend like you, or you would never ask that question. Why, the poor child will miss you, and more and more as he grows older. Frank will miss you—I shall miss you."

"Will you, Catherine?"

"Yes, every evening we spend—every social hour. Your name will be a household word to us, mixed with our blessings and our tears."

"Catherine!"

"It is true—all true; and more than this, a thousand-fold, is true. Why, you have lately been such a good angel to me that I hardly know how—indeed, I can not—what a fool I am!"

Catherine wiped away her tears, and then resumed with firmness,—

"Nevertheless, you *must* go."

"I will go, Catherine."

"God bless you! and help you through every difficulty, and give you peace—his own peace, which the world can neither give nor take away."

Cleveland turned away without saying good-night, and did not return that evening. Frank, too, was late; and when at last he entered the house, he walked directly up to his wife, and clasped her in his arms, unable to utter a single word.

"What is it?" asked Catherine. "Has any thing happened?"

Her husband looked steadily and long into her face.



He seemed to be reading her very soul for the first time. There was no sorrow in his countenance, though it was very grave, but a deep earnestness which Catherine could not understand. At last he said—

“Cleveland has been talking to me for three hours. I know all now.”

“Oh yes, about his going to Australia—poor fellow!”

“No, not that, though he has told me that too.”

“What then? What *has* happened? Do tell me, Frank. You almost frighten me, and yet you do not look distressed.”

“My own Katey! my precious wife!” said Frank. But his utterance was choked. He was not ashamed of his tears. It was right that he should weep, and he felt it so.

“Cleveland,” he said at length, “has been telling me all about you, Katey.”

“About me! What could he find to tell about me?”

“Shame on that husband who lets another man tell him more than he knows about his own wife! Yet so it is with me.”

“I can not understand you, Frank. Do speak more plainly. Your words sound shocking, but your looks are comforting and kind.”

“Ah! you know it all too well, my Katey. Deep down in that true, faithful heart of yours, what have you not been suffering!”

“Suffering, Frank? I have been so happy.”

“Yes, all good people are happy; but some of them are martyrs not the less.”

“Hush, Frank! how can you talk to me of being a martyr now? All that is past and gone. You are only mocking me, I see, after all; and I thought you were so serious.”

“Believe me, Kate, I never was more serious in my



life. I have cause to be serious; for what a wretch I have been! Cleveland has told me all, poor fellow! He said he wanted to make a clean breast before he left us forever. He has shown me exactly how the case has been standing between you and us—we enjoying ourselves wholly without regard to you—eating and drinking, and entertaining company; while you toiled on from day to day with only one servant. We smoking in your pretty drawing-room, and spoiling all your wifish pride; waking the sick child; doing every thing that was selfish, gross, and mean; and you bearing all with that pleased and happy look which kept me from finding out what a vile brute I was. But I know all now. I see it only too plainly. You never can deceive me again.”

“I will never try, Frank. It is right that we should see our mutual interest with the same eyes, and work for it with the same good will. No family can be truly happy where this is not the case. The only blessing I have craved, in addition to all my others, has been that you should see as I do about managing our household so as to be truly honorable and just. I have nothing left to wish for now.”

“It puzzles me, Kate, what you would have done, had Cleveland not befriended you in this way.”

“I would have gone on as I had been doing before.”

“How?”

“I would have worked and prayed. And, Frank—dear Frank—I do believe there is no difficulty so complicated, no path so rough, no day so dark, but that, if we go on quietly working and praying, something will occur to give us light, and set us free.”

“It is a blessed trust.”

“It is a very simple one.”

“Where did you learn it?”

“I can not tell exactly. It came, I think, with sorrow,



and with penitence and shame, that I had boasted of what it was simply my duty to do, and so made you hate the mention of what I did. And thus, you know, there came between us a little cloud. I scarcely know how. But it is gone now. Perhaps, too, that long night, when the child was so ill, brought many things to my mind which I had not understood before, and made me see some things very little which I had fancied great before; and some—oh! so great and good, which I had esteemed too lightly.”

And so it was in this her simple way that Catherine laid bare her heart before her husband; and both were happy in the clear and perfect understanding brought about between them—rationally and truly happy. There was, however, hanging over both the shadow of a heavy trial, which they could scarcely venture to anticipate in all its painful reality.

It was the parting with Cleveland. Yet both believed it was for his good—for the best in every way. He had, indeed, of late become so changed to Catherine—she had learned to see him with such different eyes, that while she playfully called him the uncle of her child, she felt that to her he was almost more than a brother. She did not know, she would not have believed, had she been told, how much her own kind womanly feelings, her simple and unpretending performance of daily duty, and her own improved character under the discipline of circumstances, had to do with developing the best elements of his. So true it is that all real goodness is diffusive in itself, and tends to bring out goodness in others.

Dreading the protracted suffering of a long preparation, Cleveland soon made ready for his departure, after he had once decided upon this important step. His farewell to the inmates of the villa was hastened over, in order that there might be no melting of his heart, no



turning back from his purpose. It was, in reality, a solemn and affecting interview to the three friends; but, like many such, was filled up very much with little questions about personal matters, and charges to be remembered, and promises to write, and at last with the lingering hold of familiar hands, that might never feel each other's cordial grasp again.

Catherine had already sent a box to the vessel, not to be opened until the lonely passenger should be on board. When first told of this, he did not care what it contained. The friends themselves were all to him, not what their kindness might suggest for his comfort. But when, a thousand miles from his native shore, he examined his treasure—for it was a treasure then—he could scarcely see what it contained for gathering tears. He knew what kind hand had worked for him by night and day, and he blessed the womanly consideration which had left so little unprovided which a poor alien brother might require in that unknown land where he was to *work*. Yes, to work, and pray. He knew who he would work for then. The good mother's jesting words about the fortune for her child sunk deep into his heart; for how much did he not owe to these beloved friends?

We will not look so far into the future as to say that a fortune was actually bequeathed to Catherine's oldest boy by an uncle who had lived long abroad. We will not tell even of a wealthy stranger just past the meridian of life, somewhat travel-worn, and his hair slightly tinged with gray, who came and stood again beside Frank Osbourne's hearth, as if it had once been a familiar place. Suffice it for our present purpose, that year by year some liberal present came by the Australian ships, with frequent letters telling of a strange cheerfulness, resulting, the writer thought, from constant and successful work.

"Yes, and from prayer as well as work," said Cath-



erine, as she folded up one of Cleveland's letters. These she always read carefully through before opening the box of treasures, which came in time to be clamored for by many little voices besides that of Uncle Cleveland's hopeful boy.



## FOREST FARM.

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### CHAPTER I.

AT the close of a dull day in November, Mary Ashton looked from the door of her house into the gathering darkness, and stretched her hand out to feel if the rain, which had threatened all day, had begun to fall. Nothing could look more dreary, or sound less like comfort, than the few objects she could distinguish, and the dripping of the mist, which had not yet exactly thickened into rain. All within the room which Mary occupied was, however, the very opposite of dreariness. Here with a brightly-blazing fire, and tea already made, she sat down again to await the return of her husband from market. He was expected every moment, and while she added a little more water to the brewing tea from a bright kettle that sung merrily beside the fire, she listened, with her quick ear turned toward the window, for the well-known sound of his horse upon the graveled road which led past the end of the house toward the stables.

It came at last, and Mary threw aside her sewing in order to give undivided attention to the hot buttered cakes, and other more savory viands with which she always took care that her table should be supplied. William Ashton was a good while coming in. Mary heard him order a warm mash for his mare; and then she fancied that he struck the dog—a sure sign that things had not gone well with him in the market; but she said nothing, and did not even rush out to hear the news. William, like most men, preferred to tell his news spon-



taneously, not to have it wrung out of him. So Mary, by her manner, might have cared nothing at all about the market, which had that day been a sort of cattle fair as well; and there had been a young colt of considerable promise, of her husband's, to sell, with some other matters of moment to be adjusted, all far from being indifferent to Mary in the present state of their affairs. But still she said nothing, except about the weather, which she felt sure must be very cold, the fire burned so clearly. And this furnished an excuse for stirring it afresh, until all the room glowed with a sort of radiance, enough to cheer the heart of any man not altogether down in the world, and despairing of ever being up again. And Mary herself was as good or better than her fire. A brighter face never welcomed a husband home; a neater and more compact person never bustled about when there was business to be done, or slipped quietly into the right place, and sat still when there was none.

William Ashton was, indeed, very sad at heart on this November night. Every thing had gone wrong with him at the fair. Wheat had fallen in price, and he had a quantity that must be disposed of preparatory to the half yearly rent-day. The colt, as if possessed with the demon of contradiction, never held up its head, nor showed off its capital breeding while the judges were looking on, and was sold at last for little more than half the sum which William had calculated upon. For why? Simply because he wanted money, and could not well afford to keep it until the spring, when it might have fetched some twenty or even thirty pounds more. But, as he said, every thing went against a man short of capital; so that it had become one of his frequent complaints, that a man with scanty means could not afford to make money.

No man is insensible to a genial fire on a cold night in



November, or to the comfort of such a meal, half tea and half supper, as Mary had the art of setting out. So by degrees William's discontent began to melt away, and then he opened out, and told his wife of every thing having gone just as much against him as was possible during that day's transactions. And Mary listened with a swelling heart, for she knew only too well the difficulties of their position, and how the difference of a few hundreds of pounds on the wrong side would send them fairly off the farm, she could not imagine to what place next. She was naturally a great looker on into the future, and no woman liked better to see the way clear in advance than she did; but this question had puzzled Mary a good deal of late—what they should do if compelled to leave the farm.

There is no describing the face and person of Mary Ashton, without using one of the most familiar and favorite words in that part of England where she lived, though a word but little used, and never appreciated, in the South—the more the pity. Bonny—yes, that was exactly what Mary looked, and was; and now her bonny face, though very earnest in its expression of attention to what her husband was saying, betrayed neither alarm nor discontent, but kept its bright look as fresh as ever, just as if there was hope yet—floods—oceans of hope for the future, to be drawn upon at will under every emergency. And so, in fact, there was for Mary, because she was a good woman, and had the strongest possible faith that her Father in heaven would neither forsake her nor hers, unless they should first forsake him.

But, besides this deep and abiding faith, Mary was happy in the possession of a naturally cheerful and buoyant spirit—one that found amusement, and often consolation too, in all the little innocent and familiar pleasures of the moment, such as she contrived to surround her-



self with so abundantly as scarcely ever to appear the careful and economical housekeeper which she really was. Mary had, for her part, cares enough—quite enough to have made some women put on a very doleful face. She had two extremely little children, and a third in not very distant prospect; but nobody ever heard her complain of these as troubles. She called them all blessings, and sang and laughed with her babies, and ran about the house with them as if they were only playthings in her arms, but comforts—real, solid comforts—deep down in her heart. And dearly indeed did Mary love the fun and frolic of these children, which she fancied were more entertaining than other people's. And if having a cheerful, merry-hearted mother could make them so, there was every reason to suppose that Mary's estimate of her children was a correct one.

Indeed, she was very much like a spring bird in the house, that bonny little wife and mother, all through the deep winter, when the snow lay thick on the ground, and William was a little short in his rent, and turnips were diseased, and sheep did badly, and all things looked dismal and dark to William's eye, except—and that was a pretty considerable exception—the cheery little wife who made his home look like a perfect paradise of comfort all the while, and never once complained even of being weary, unless it was sometimes at the close of a very busy day, when she would exclaim, "What a grand invention sleep was, to come just when it was wanted, and set all right again for another day's work!"

William Ashton was a fine, tall, handsome young man, just of that grade in society in which, with a little spare money, a man may assume the gentleman, and nobody will dispute his right to that title. But let him fall only one degree lower, and he is nobody, or less than nobody; because he wants the dignity, and independence,



and perhaps the bodily strength of a common laborer. When he first married, William had kept his hunter, and had wine on his table every day. He had taken his wife from a highly respectable home, though without much fortune; and he had a generous kind of pride in seeing her surrounded by all the comforts, and even the luxuries to which she had been accustomed in her father's house. This was at a period of England's history when farmers in prosperous agricultural districts were really gentlemen, often cultivating, even as tenants, more than a thousand acres, and employing for such purposes a large amount of capital, which it was no uncommon thing for the farmer of those times to be able to command. If the master of such means, with his plentiful table and fine stud of horses, maintained the rank of a gentleman at public or private dinners, his family were generally equally solicitous to keep up the same pretensions in their general habits; and when to these were added a good education, with refined or literary tastes, a happier kind of life than that of the well-to-do farmer could scarcely be met with through the whole range of human society.

We will not pretend that either William or Mary Ashton could have ranked with the most intelligent of this class. We are not quite sure that they spoke French, or sang Italian, or were very deeply read in polite literature. Nay, we half suspect that a little Yorkshire dialect mingled with their familiar expressions. But, on the other hand, they were very far removed in habits of life and general conversation from that class of townspeople who have to do with trade in a small way; and, as already said, they lived at a time when farmers were people of considerable standing, both in the opinion of the world and in their own.

The aspect of the world's affairs in these respects was,



however, changing a little about the time of William's marriage, and he had but a small capital to begin with; for his father, though fond of money, had never been a money-making man. He began life, too, upon a poor farm, that could never, under any circumstances, have repaid him for any great outlay; and from keeping his hunter for himself, and a pony and chaise for Mary's use, William had been obliged to give up first one thing, and then another, until he found himself scarcely looked upon by the very gentlemen who used, at one time, to be hand in glove with him in the field. Against the pony chaise Mary herself had very soon protested. She declared she had no time for driving about, though she had been celebrated as the best whip in the neighborhood. Her skill in riding, too, was so perfect, that to part with the pony perhaps did cost her a sigh; but pony and chaise were at length both sold; and, as the latter was a thing then little used in that part of the country, it went for scarcely half its original cost, and the pony for a mere nothing. Mary could not let it go without the certainty of a good home; and, as it was old, the purchaser said she could not expect much for it. Thus, even in their prudential givings up, they were losers to a considerable extent, still proving the truth of William's words, "That people who are short of money can not afford to get rich."

Before the winter, which commenced so inauspiciously, was over, William brought home from market one day a letter which had caused him considerable agitation of mind, but which, notwithstanding some faint touch of pleasure mingling with this excitement, he hesitated a good while before showing to his wife.

Mary was quick to decipher any expression of her husband's face, and she was sure, on this occasion, that he had heard something, or seen somebody, or that some



event had occurred out of the common way. Putting a strong restraint upon herself (for she was naturally quick, and, with all her good qualities, not the most patient woman in the world), Mary worked off her wondering excitement by making herself unusually busy about the children getting off to bed, and then about the tea, and all sorts of things, until at last, after her husband had swallowed more tea than usual, he looked up suddenly and said,

“Mary, how should you like to go and live at Forest Farm?”

“What!” exclaimed Mary, “is your father going to leave?”

“Leave! No. What made you think of that?”

“Why, how else should we go to live there?”

“That is just the question I have to answer. The house, you know, is large—twice as large as they want—and—”

“Oh, never, William, never! A mud cottage, if you like, with you—an Irish cabin—any thing by ourselves. But to live with another family, impossible!”

“Well, Mary, don’t be so hasty; I only asked you a question.”

“And I have answered it.”

“Very well. That’s enough. Only, I suppose, you can’t exactly tell me what else we can do.”

William said this with a most unmistakable tone of anger, and Mary began to feel sorry that she had spoken out so strongly without hearing more. But among her faults—and she was by no means perfect—this was, perhaps, her greatest—that she felt so strongly, she did sometimes speak out more warmly than she ought. And now she wanted to hear more, and she had, in a manner, closed the door upon her husband’s confidence. What could she do? She went up to him, threw her arms



round his neck, and, with many kisses, told him she was sorry she had spoken so hastily, and that if he was really serious in what he had proposed, she would sit down and listen to all he had to say, without setting herself against any thing unless it was wrong.

William knew his wife too well to doubt her promise. He had tried her often, and always after being a little wrong, and confessing it, found her as right as any woman could be; so he told her to sit down, and then he took a letter from his pocket, and read it to her from beginning to end, while she listened without another word.

This letter was from William's father, who lived at Forest Farm—indeed, owned it, for it had been left to him by a brother some five or six years before, very much to the surprise of every body, because the brother had two sons of his own—the elder, to be sure, a kind of scapegrace, but the younger a prudent—an exceedingly prudent lawyer, settled in a neighboring town. What could possess old Mr. Ashton to bequeath this property to his brother nobody could imagine, unless it was that he was really superannuated, as some people said, and did not know what he was about. But so it was; and the present Mr. Ashton, William's father, entered upon the farm immediately after his brother's death, and had managed, or endeavored to manage, it ever since.

Forest Farm was no very lucrative possession, after all. It was situated near some extensive woods and preserves, belonging to a sporting nobleman; was overrun with game; and being poor land, and long neglected, was likely to cost quite enough to cultivate it, even in the most sparing manner, without any rent to pay. Besides this, the dwelling-house upon it was a large, old-fashioned, rambling sort of place, in a very dilapidated condition, which could not be kept secure against wind and weath-



er without considerable outlay, to say nothing of the destitution of comfort which such a habitation must exhibit when utterly fallen into neglect.

It was a great thing to talk about, and to think about, however, to be the possessor of Forest Farm; and most of the family, not excepting William, shared the satisfaction which this bequest afforded—William, perhaps, more than the others; for, being the oldest son, it was only reasonable to suppose that he would one day inherit the property himself, and then, of course, he would do great things, and make quite a different place of it altogether.

Mary had never from the first liked the idea of this farm, so that William had learned to refrain from all direct mention of it in his plans for the future. She even went so far as to declare it to be her opinion that the family had no right to it, and that William could never enter upon it with a clear conscience while his two cousins were living. Mary knew very little about law, but she had strong feelings on the subject of equity; and she said, again and again, that in spite of her uncle's will, there could be no equity in William's accepting the ownership of this property after his father's death. So, after a few warm discussions on the subject, it had been dropped altogether between the husband and wife; and, as the father was at that time a hale and hearty man, there would clearly have been little wisdom in building any definite plan upon what might take place after his death.

From some cause or other, however, Mr. Ashton never seemed to be exactly the same man after he had entered upon this farm. His wife said it was the windy old house, and the damp situation on the skirts of the wood. But, whatever it might be, one thing was certain—that old age, with all its attendant feebleness and irresolution, came apace upon the proprietor of Forest Farm. His



figure became cramped with rheumatism; his means were evidently cramped, nobody knew how or why; and his faculties appeared also cramped, for he never knew his own mind about any plan of management to be pursued, but pottered and bungled, until he seemed poorer, instead of richer, than he had ever been in his life before.

The letter he had written to his son was a formal and lengthy proposal that he should go and live with his parents in the large house, and take the management of the whole concern, in order that the old man might, as he expressed it, feel at liberty to be fairly laid aside; for, what with rheumatics, and his long-standing asthma, and increasing years, and the contrariness of the people about him, he felt himself entirely unequal to the duties of his position. The servants he trusted cheated him, he said; the agents he employed made matters worse; all things went against him, for even the seasons were not what they used to be. So he proposed to his son that he should bring his wife and family, and live in that portion of the house which he and his old woman never occupied; and he would agree either to give William a certain percentage upon the profits of the farm, or in some other way would endeavor to meet his requirements, as might be settled between themselves.

All the time her husband was reading this letter, Mary felt painfully conscious of the reawakening of certain feelings which she had been struggling throughout the whole of her married life to keep down. To tell the truth, she had never much liked William's family, his father and mother least of all. The old man had no religion, she did not think he had much integrity; and what small pretense the mother had to either went but a very little way with Mary, who was true and honest to her heart's core. Here, then, was a situation for a



young wife to be placed in—to live with people so totally opposed to all that she most approved and valued, and to live with them, too, in a place incapable of comfort; never to be mistress in her own home; and, worse than all, to see her husband continually subjected to influences such as it had been the most earnest desire of her heart to avoid.

To describe Mary honestly, it must be stated of her that she was a Methodist in her religious profession—a staunch, stirring, earnest Methodist. Her husband knew this when he married her. The name carried no stigma with it in that neighborhood, so many of the wealthy and respectable families there acknowledging the same. She was so reasonable a woman, too, that she never allowed her profession to be a cause of stumbling to her husband. Indeed, she went with him every Sunday morning to their parish church, and only joined her own people sometimes in the evening, and in their weekly services. But her heart was with them as a people. She had been brought up in their communion, and nothing could have induced her to resign the privilege of this familiar, and to her, most dear and sacred fellowship.

For such a woman to live constantly with an irreligious old man, to pay him the respect due to a father, and to be placed in close and constant intercourse with other members of a family all neglected and ill governed, might well appall a mind even less sensitive than Mary's to all circumstances connected with domestic comfort, social respectability, and religious welfare. Indeed, so entirely overwhelming was the contemplation of this change altogether, that, taken as she was by surprise, Mary could scarcely even pray that night without saying, "Any thing but this." And if she was, on that occasion, longer on her knees than usual, it was because she had a stout heart to contend with, in absolute rebellion



against that which seemed to have come upon her like a decree sent forth to desolate her life, and to make it miserable forevermore.

But prayer was no weak exercise with Mary. It was rather a struggle for life or for death. She prayed like the Puritans of old, with the same unshaken confidence in the force of prayer to overcome, not what she did not like, but to overcome all within herself that might be inimical to the Divine Will. In this spirit she knelt down; and if she did not overcome at once, she rose up at last a different creature; and, with a peculiar light upon her countenance, she went to the side of the bed where her husband was lying, and placing the candle on the table beside him, said softly, but firmly,—

“William, I *will* go if you think it best that we should.”

## CHAPTER II.

EARLY in the month of April the great change was made by William and Mary of removing, with their children and all their worldly goods, to Forest Farm. Mary had exerted herself in the business of preparation for this change a little beyond her strength, and she was altogether in circumstances that might have furnished an excuse for no inconsiderable amount of depression, if not of absolute distress. But when Mary had a duty to perform, she did it heartily, not grudgingly. It was not her habit, as we sometimes see, to make a merit of resignation, and so just cast herself upon the stream of events, as if to be passive was the highest Christian virtue. “If it’s right, it *is* right,” Mary would say with peculiar emphasis; and that being the case, what could there be to hesitate or grumble about? Beyond this, however, though she made no parade of such matters, she had a



deeper feeling that what God appointed as a duty he would not fail to help her to perform; and if she professed to be his servant, surely that service, above all others, should be a cheerful as well as a faithful service. Thus she never did even what she most disliked in itself by halves. She said that was the way to make all work disagreeable. On the contrary, she gave herself to it, head, heart, and hand; and in the very act of working in this manner there is always a sort of cheerfulness, independently of other circumstances.

The first appearance of the house and premises at Forest Farm was any thing but inviting, after a cold, dreary journey with two young children. There was not, indeed, any thing like a welcome awaiting them, either without or within; not from any absence of desire to receive them, but rather from absolute inability to get up a welcome with the least show of comfort in it for any body. And yet there was sufficient agency about the house. Mrs. Ashton had been in a terrible fidget all day, wandering from room to room, and wondering what could be done, instead of doing it. And there was her large handsome daughter, Bessy, capable of any amount of effort, if she would but make it. There was a stout and able servant too, though of a somewhat uncouth description. Yet all seemed waiting and wondering, and not a thing had been made to look ready for the newcomers, with the exception of a fire being lighted in a large, almost vacant room, with an old table standing in the middle of it, but without a single chair to sit down upon.

William was evidently very much disconcerted by the aspect of the home to which he had brought his wife. He was ashamed, too, that their own servant should see such a forlorn-looking place, and be the witness of such a welcome. He did his best, however—and a powerful



and willing arm can do much—to place his wife in more comfortable circumstances, by snatching up various articles of furniture out of other parts of the house, and running with them into the apartment into which Mary and the children had been shown.

Had Mary been well enough to laugh, the spectacle of what William was doing would have afforded her no little entertainment; but her ability to bear up was nearly exhausted, one very cogent reason why the moving was hurried through having been the near approach of an event which rendered some provision for comfort almost indispensable. She might, in fact, have been excused if, on looking around her, she had burst into tears. But no; she would not do that for her husband's sake. So, forcibly swallowing down the peculiar bitterness of her present lot, she gave her undivided attention to the children, who cried that disconsolate cry which tells too plainly to the mother's ear that they are not where they want to be; the eldest, who could speak, calling out in plain words, "I want to go home. Do take me home." A substantial meal was the best means of quieting this melancholy wail, which, by the help of her nurse, Mary was at length able to obtain. Then William talked of tea, and by a great deal of urging, and even scolding on his part, it was, in time, obtained. But oh, how different, when it did come, from the kind of meal which Mary was accustomed to make of tea in her own home!

William was rapidly becoming absolutely cross; and Mary, struck with the miserable expression of his face, saw plainly it would never do for her to sink, let the aspect of things be what it might.

"Our furniture will be here soon," she said, "and then we shall be all right."

"We can't unpack it before the morning," said William, "and how in the world we are to exist through the night, I declare I don't know."



"Why, look here!" exclaimed Mary, throwing open the door of an adjoining room, in which there were two beds. "If only the beds are not damp, we shall do grandly."

"But the carpets?" said William.

"Oh, never mind carpets!" replied Mary. "Here is a strip, you see. We can set the children down upon that. All I care about is whether these beds have been thoroughly aired."

This point was soon settled satisfactorily, for Mrs. Ashton was morbidly sensitive on the subject of damp; and the children, being more than reconciled by the indulgence of undressing at the fire, were got to bed in high good-humor; and then William and Mary sat down themselves, to talk a while over their own matters. The fire burned brightly up a wide, old-fashioned chimney; and William, congratulating himself upon the comfort of having plenty of fuel, threw on another log, and then, with his elbows on his knees, leaned forward and listened to the crackling of the wood—a sound which has soothed many a disturbed spirit besides his.

The night came on wet and dreary, and it was late before the wagons with the furniture arrived—so late that nothing could be taken out before morning. There was a long time for the husband and wife to talk and cogitate upon their situation, and Mary employed the slowly-passing moments in asking William about his family. Bessy Ashton, his sister, had struck her very much, as she did most people, by her fine commanding figure and really handsome countenance. She was a young woman of two or three-and-twenty, tall and erect in person, when she chose to hold herself up; and with something so decided, as well as powerful, in her form and carriage, that, failing in the queenly aspect which she ought to have borne, she was in imminent danger of looking vul-



gar; nor is it quite certain that Bessy did not sometimes deserve the appellation of blowzy.

Mary had seen her before, but she fancied it must have been under more favorable circumstances; for she was half-frightened to look at her now, there was such an expression of defiant self-will in her countenance, while her very movements all contributed to indicate a sort of care-for-nobody spirit, which was any thing but engaging to a sister-in-law come to dwell beneath the same roof with her.

"Poor Bess!" said William as he gazed into the fire.

"Why *poor*?" asked Mary. "She seems, I should say, very well able to defend herself, and to maintain her own rights."

"There are rights that some people consider wrongs," observed William rather mysteriously.

"Has any trouble come upon her?" asked Mary.

"The old story," replied William; "that cousin of ours—he that always brought trouble, and always will."

"Tom Ashton, do you mean?"

"Yes, he who should have been master and owner here, if he had only known how to conduct himself."

"But what has that to do with Bessy?"

"Only this—that since they were children they have always held together, and now it's worse than that."

"How do you mean worse?"

"Why, womanlike, no sooner did Bessy find that he was done out here—that, in fact, his own conduct had set every body against him—that he hadn't a single friend left in the whole world, than she must fall over head and ears in love with him, and take his part through thick and thin, and even declare that she means to marry him."

"Poor Bessy, indeed! But she must have a great spirit to do that—a great spirit, or else great love."



"Bess has both. Thorough in every thing, she never loves by halves."

"And yet it was only a half-welcome she gave us when we came."

"Half! It was no welcome at all. She didn't mean it for one. I could have taken her by the shoulders, and turned her out at the door. Shame on her for an insolent hussy!"

"Hush, William! I rather like her that she made no pretense to what she did not feel. Perhaps she will like me better after a while."

"Why, yes, I should hope so. And after all, I do believe the girl has some heart in her, if you could only get at it. She's a fine creature, isn't she?"

"You have hit the right expression. She is a fine creature, or rather she might be. What a figure! what a head! I long to do her up a little bit—just to make her hair tidy."

"You should see her when she does herself up. My word! she's like a queen—she used to be, however; but I think this trouble has changed her altogether."

"Does Tom Ashton ever come here?"

"Not openly—at least, very seldom; but I think she sees him sometimes—perhaps often."

"Where is he, and what does he do?"

"Nobody knows what he does, except drink, and idle about in bad company. We fancy, but we don't know, that his brother Peter makes him a small allowance. Peter won't give more than he thinks himself forced to; but, for decency's sake, he may, perhaps, do something."

"What was Tom brought up to?"

"Farming, in one sense; but he learned with a land surveyor, and sometimes even now he may get a job in that way. Did you ever see him?"



"No, never. I have seen Peter, but Tom I never saw to my knowledge."

"He's a splendid fellow to look at. Pity he and Peter can not change heads and faces."

"What is he like? Does he not look rather low?"

"Not a bit when he has a good coat on his back; nor speak in a low way either. Indeed, he might sit at the table of a lord, for that matter."

"Is he like Peter at all?"

"The very opposite. Tom is dark, with jet black hair, and such eyes! You would not wonder at any girl liking him if you could see him and hear him talk. And then he has a sort of kind way with him, especially to women, and can be as gentle as a woman himself when he likes."

"What made him get wrong in the first instance?"

"I blame Peter, and many people do the same. I hate that fellow, Peter."

"For shame, William! What do you hate him for?"

"For continually scheming and framing excuses, and making people believe they haven't their own heads on their shoulders, and yet always working for himself in some way. That unfortunate Tom was just the other way, and never would conceal any thing, nor make the best of his own case either; for, when his father suspected him wrongly, he let him suspect, and wouldn't stoop to clear himself. So Peter, with his cool head and smooth tongue, took advantage of this, and set the old man against him, and at last got him almost turned out of house and home."

"What was that for?"

"Why, to get himself in, to be sure. Peter was the youngest, you see; and by rights the property ought to have gone to Tom, the oldest son."

"And yet it did not go to either of them, but to your father. How could that come about?"



“Nay, there are wiser folks than me can’t answer that question. But so it was; and law is law.”

“Yes; but is law always justice?”

“In one sense it is. However, we can not any of us set law aside, whether just or unjust.”

“But this poor Bessy! I can’t help thinking about her. What is to be the end of all this, I wonder?”

“And I wonder too. Tom talks of going off to America.”

“And would Bessy go with him?”

“She can’t go: she would never be so mad. Why, they haven’t ten pounds between them!”

“They have youth and strength. They might work.”

“Tom is no worker. The worst of him is, he is content to hang about, as all such fellows do, that take to drinking. He has lost his self-respect, and his resolution too, I think; so that when he talks of doing any thing, he never gets it done. This, I fancy, vexes Bessy more than all besides; they would have been off long since, if he had been resolute like her.”

“Can’t she persuade him to keep sober for her sake?”

“It seems not; besides which, he had always that fault—shillyshallying. His father had it, and never did any good. Every body, you know, has some one leading fault, which fathers and mothers ought to see to in their children. This was Tom’s, and I’ll answer for it, nothing was ever done for him in that way. When he was a boy we used to be friends, and then he used to fire up quick as gunpowder; but after a blaze it was all over, gone out and spent, and he was good for very little to go on with.”

“That’s a bad fault indeed! I know of none worse for a man. Poor Bessy! I do pity her if that is the case with the man she loves.”

“That’s his case, most certainly; and when you add



loose, intemperate habits to that, and false friends who persuade him this way and the other, one saying he wouldn't do a thing if he was in his place, and another he would, why, it seems to me there's no help for such a man."

"It does, indeed, look very much like a case without help. But I won't believe it is quite without hope yet. You know, William, there is always hope while there is a good God in heaven, and a blessed Savior to trust to."

"But what if we defy that God, break his laws, think nothing of His blessed Son, and set our faces quite the opposite way?"

"Then, indeed, if we continue so, we must be lost. But they are so young, so inexperienced. I can not help thinking one of them, at least, might be brought into a better way."

"Which is that one?"

"Your sister Bessy."

"Try her—just try her. Let some of your preachers come and try to convert her. I wouldn't answer for their lives. Ah, you don't know Bessy!"

"Well," thought Mary, as she prepared to retire for the night, "I have come among strange people, as well as into a strange place. I must take care not to vex them, at any rate."

And so, with many other patient thoughts, and with feelings much subdued by her present circumstances, Mary fell asleep at last, to awake in the morning with that wondering sense of strangeness, which, in this instance, was scarcely rendered more agreeable by being resolved into certainty as to where she really was. It was a sad awaking, for though the birds in the neighboring wood were making a pretense to sing, every near object looked so dreary, comfortless, and unlike home, that Mary would have closed her eyes again, if only to



shut out that ugly view ; but that her children also were beginning to stir, and a little prattle in the neighboring bed was telling how unconscious they were of not being in their own familiar home. The older child, a boy, was telling his little sister where he would take her to that day, among rabbits, and Guinea-pigs, and hens, and pigeons, never, alas ! to be disturbed by their little pattering feet again.

The day to which the little party of new-comers woke proved to be one of almost unmitigated confusion and discomfort. There was the unpacking of all the furniture to be got through, with endless calculations about where to place it. There was the offered help of those whose services were worse than useless. There was continual misapprehension of the wishes of the family, who would not say promptly and distinctly what their wishes were ; so that Mary, who was in the habit of planning far in advance, and thus going straight on with any business which she had in hand, felt so hindered and embarrassed in all her proceedings, that she was more than once on the point of sitting down to have a thorough good cry.

In this way, arrested by continual uncertainty and confusion, half Mary's precious time was wasted. And it was precious to her, for she knew very well what was about to happen, and how important it was that she should make the most of the present opportunity for putting all things in their right places while she could. Toward evening, however, all was over with her strength and capability. She was obliged to retire from the scene of action, leaving her husband to do the best he could ; and when another morning dawned, and the light again streamed in at the large uncurtained window of her bedroom, which was still far from being in a condition of order, behold ! there was a tiny little babe lying beside



its mother in the bed, while a strange nurse was seated at the fire. The countenance of this nurse Mary herself was busily contemplating, though without being able to form any definite opinion as to the character of the being in whose society she was now destined to spend a large portion of the following month.

This nurse was one whom old Mrs. Ashton had previously engaged. She had once been a servant in the family at Forest Farm, had lived in that very house during many years of the older Mr. Ashton's life, had attended upon him in his long illness, and knew perhaps more of the family affairs of both houses than any other human being. If, therefore, this nurse should prove at all a companionable woman, she might be of great use to Mary in giving her a clearer insight into her real situation than could be obtained from any individual connected by the closer ties of relationship. And Mary felt the more need of some assistance from this quarter, because she saw already but too plainly that scarcely was there one member of the household, unless it might be her husband, whose evidence could be relied upon as impartial, because none were entirely unprejudiced.

Mary would have been the last woman to endeavor to elicit the secrets of her husband's family from a subordinate, or, indeed, from any one; but it must not be imagined that even Mary, with all her innate and all her cultivated sense of propriety, was so far removed in position from that of a respectable nurse, as to be above conversing with her in a manner by no means unlikely to draw forth the information most important for her own right guidance for the future. So Mary chatted with her nurse as soon as she was strong enough to do so, much after the manner of other women similarly circumstanced; and it was quite natural that their conversation should not unfrequently turn upon the old



house, and the old family in which the woman had lived so long.

Almost all nurses have some favorite mistress or lady patroness—some model mother—some pattern wife—some heroine to them, whose character embodies in remembrance all which they are capable of appreciating as excellent or admirable. The wife of the elder Mr. Ashton was all this to nurse Mason. She was the mistress into whose service she had first entered when a girl; and though she died early, while her two sons were only boys, Mrs. Mason described her influence in the house as something never to be forgotten nor effaced. The nurse was no reasoner, or she would have seen that in the after course of both these boys the mother's influence told for nothing, or worse than nothing. But the woman would not see that. Of Peter she seldom spoke, but by the other poor unfortunate she held almost as faithfully as Bessy herself, persisting in it that he inherited his mother's disposition, and that it was in consequence of his acute sense of the unsupportable loss he had sustained by her death that he had given himself to evil ways.

With such convictions deeply impressed upon her own mind, Mrs. Mason had no difficulty in creating a true and tender interest in the mind of her hearer, on behalf of those whose early lives, whose affectionate intercourse, whose joyful meetings, whose tearful partings, whose misfortunes and successes, the nurse described with all that familiar detail which is peculiar to the recollections of persons of this class. And Mary listened with her warmest feelings alive to what had gone before in the experience of the dwellers beneath that roof. She listened until the old house, with its low rafters and bare walls, its mullioned windows and ancient oak stairs, began to wear a different aspect in her estimation; more especially when she learned that the pattern lady—for



the nurse always called her a *lady*—who had once been the mistress of that mansion, was a religious woman, as well as a good wife and mother, and had actually been brought up among those who were familiar with the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield.

“That poor young man, then,” she said to the nurse one day, “must have been the child of many prayers.”

“He was indeed,” said Mrs. Mason. “If prayer could save him, he will never be lost, even yet.”

“He never will,” said Mary, with a strange confidence in her tone; and when the nurse looked at her, there was something written on her countenance which reminded her of that beloved mistress whose praises were ever on her lips. It was the evidence of a strong faith written there, in characters which the woman had no skill to read, though she bowed before it with a reverence which nothing altogether human could have inspired.

### CHAPTER III.

HAD Mary set about in the most studious manner to please the family with whom she was now an inmate, she would scarcely have been more successful than she was in merely following the bent of her own natural disposition, which always led her to take a lively and untiring interest in the details, however small, of what was immediately around her. Little think some of those abstracted, meditative people, who ponder and speculate upon things far off, and spin fine theories out of that which exists only in idea, what a charm there is in this tendency to get immediate good out of present things by habitually making the most of the “five gateways of knowledge.”

Mary was particularly quick in her perceptions; but that was not all. She had a warm place in her heart for



what those perceptions gathered up and brought in ; so that with her a certain amount of feeling almost always accompanied the act of perceiving, either of joy or sorrow, such as came through the channels of a quick sympathy, extending down to the minutest enjoyments or sufferings, even of the animal creation. To a character like Mary's belongs an intense love of flowers ; of pretty garniture ; of order and symmetry ; of fine animals, and especially of their young, such as little downy ducks and chickens, puppies, kittens, lambs, or any thing that can be petted and fondled, and made happier by human kindness.

To such women a farm-house, with its outdoor appurtenances full of teeming life, is a perfect elysium of enjoyment ; and no sooner was Mary well enough to take any part in attending to such matters, than she might be seen sometimes feeding the poultry, at others rambling with her children among the sheep and lambs. Nay, even the stables were not unvisited by her ; nor was there a cow upon the farm whose good or bad points she did not take note of and discuss. All this pleased old Mr. Ashton exceedingly. His wife looked on and wondered, not unfrequently repeating to herself, what might have stood for the motto of her own life, "I hope she won't be meddling."

Meddling was the exact thing which Mrs. Ashton had always been most studious to avoid in herself, and to put down in others. Her moral creed went no farther than this—to let things alone. Had the greatest injustice been transacted before her eyes, by the virtue of not meddling she would have felt justified in washing her hands of all responsibility, and would thus have purchased peace for herself. Men profess to consider this tendency of Mrs. Ashton's a great virtue in a wife. Let them try it. No doubt it had served the purposes of



Mr. Ashton, and he had valued his wife accordingly—not certainly for what she actually did, but for what she was satisfied to leave undone.

It might well be considered an alarming spectacle, by such a woman, to see Mary running about in her active way, and not running without an errand either, but evidently beginning to attempt something like reform; first in the poultry-yard, then in the cow-house, and even in some other departments scarcely so likely to come under female observation. In justice to Mary, however, it must not be supposed that any thing of this kind was done in a meddling spirit, still less in a spirit of dictation. She had a peculiar tact of her own in setting about and carrying through what she was bent upon; and being naturally quick to feel, as well as to perceive, she knew exactly, and in a moment, when she was in danger of stepping beyond the boundary line of due consideration for others. Her observations, too, were carried on chiefly in the companionship of her husband, for it had always been William's great delight to have his wife with him whenever he took his walks of inspection, or made a more limited survey of the premises and homestead. And now that the spring was coming on, and there were so many young animals to look after, they had both a continual source of interest in talking over what the spring weather was likely to develop, with regard to the farm and its produce.

There was the more need for Mary to take a lively part in these matters because her husband, instead of being encouraged by his recent change of circumstances, seemed to be growing absolutely downhearted and hopeless of any good. He "could not understand things," he continually repeated to his wife. There was scarcely any stock upon the farm; all was run out, or gone to waste in some way or other; and as to capital to lay



out, he had never known his father so short before, even when he had a heavy rent to pay for his land. Where *could* the money be gone? That was the question which continually perplexed him. Mary thought they had better alter their agreement; and so, making free use of the small capital which they themselves retained, endeavor by that means to restore the farm to a good working condition, so as to obtain something more remunerative for all.

If William had cause to be dissatisfied with the state of things without, Mary had no less so within. Old Mr. Ashton had evidently taken a sort of fancy for her; he liked to have her near him to pet, and coax, and even to joke with; though his jokes, being not always the most refined, made Mary sometimes shrink and quiver as if a sharp arrow had been sent at her, instead of a jest. But worse even than this want of delicacy was the low moral tone which pervaded most of the old man's conversation, such as Mary found it difficult indeed not to rise up against with mingled indignation and disgust. She knew, however, that if once she did this, all chance of influence would be over with her forever. Besides which, she had not gone there to affront her husband's father; and she was continually reminded by the mother, though in a covert way, that she had not gone there to meddle.

So there was nothing for Mary but to be quiet for the present; and if it was at all her ambition to be wise as the serpent, to be very careful to be also harmless as the dove. Sometimes, it must be owned, that when William was from home, and not likely to come back in time to detect the trace of tears, Mary did indulge in a long fit of weeping; for with all her outward cheerfulness, and her real interest in the events of the passing hour, she was sadly out of her element among these strange peo-



ple, and, except with the old man, did not appear to be making any way at all. There was a boy—a wayward, idle, good-for-nothing boy, the youngest of the family—who seemed absolutely to despise her; and as to Bessy, the one she most desired to conciliate, there seemed to be an impassable barrier betwixt them, which no attempts on Mary's part were able to remove.

“If only she would be a little kind to the children,” Mary often said to herself, “I think I should find a way to her heart;” but she saw only too plainly that her countenance darkened when they went near her, and was not quite sure that a smart slap was not administered to them sometimes when the mother's back was turned.

It was, indeed, very difficult for Mary to make herself even moderately comfortable under these circumstances; and but for those earnest prayers which she was in the habit of pouring forth, and the strong faith she still held by, that they were heard and registered on high, she would undoubtedly have sunk altogether under the accumulated weight of miseries too vague to find a name, yet too grievous in their aggregate to be sustained by merely human fortitude. Any thing low, any thing poor, any thing mean in a worldly point of view, Mary could have borne cheerfully and nobly, had she been associated with people who kept the fear of God before them. She had never been otherwise situated in her whole life until now. She had never before lived with those who did not love honor, and truth, and fair dealing. But here she was subjected to the degradation of hearing continually some selfish chuckle of the old man's over an advantage gained, or a trick performed, or something done by which he was a gainer to another person's loss. William could ill endure this, though more accustomed to it than Mary, but he treated it rath-



er as folly than wickedness ; for, as he often told his wife, he thought his father was growing childish, and in all respects much altered for the worse during the last three or four years.

One means of refreshment to her often tried and wearied spirit was found by Mary in joining a little community of her own people, whose religious services she was able, without much difficulty, to unite in. This was almost the only point on which her husband's family interfered in any active manner with her proceedings. They did, in their very hearts as they said, despise and abhor those Methodists ; and the scorn with which they regarded their meetings, their habits in general, and all which rendered them a peculiar people, was too intense to be confined within the bounds of moderation or civility of speech. William, for peace' sake, had gone so far as to ask his wife if she could not manage to give up these meetings, at least for a while. But Mary had utterly rejected the proposal, because, as she said, it was not right to make it, and therefore it would be wrong in her to yield to such a request, made as it was, only for the sake of meeting the prejudices of those who had no religion of their own.

Tossed and tried by a thousand new and conflicting considerations, and especially pained by the under current of conviction that something was absolutely wrong in what was around and about her, it was not to be wondered at that Mary's hitherto excellent health gave way, and that she was surprised by a fit of illness unusually severe and sharp. The attack was inflammatory, requiring a good deal of attention ; and Mary's own nurse, with two children and the baby to take care of, had quite enough to do without attempting any service in the sick room. Besides which, her mistress had to be kept very quiet, so that she was under the necessity of



getting the children out of their mother's hearing as often as she could.

Had William not been an excellent nurse, Mary would have been in danger of suffering from absolute neglect; but he gave up many of his outdoor occupations to remain with her, and if he could not perform all the womanly duties of a sick-room, he could at least keep her spirits cheerful, and her mind comparatively at ease, only it was impossible for him to conceal that he was himself sadly in want of the encouragement he endeavored so studiously to impart.

Among other causes of vexation, William was both ashamed and disappointed at the behavior of his mother and sister. Mrs. Ashton, it is true, often came to the door of Mary's room, and asked if any thing was wanted. But as for really doing any thing of her own accord, that would have been too decided a departure from her usual plan of life—it would have been too much like meddling.

Like here and there one of his sex, William was always rather peevish when he was unhappy; and now his reiterated exclamations about "that Bess," as he chose to call his sister, afforded a channel, though not a very amiable one, through which a flood of irritated feelings seemed to flow, all centring in their violence upon that one leading fact of Bessy's never offering a helping hand, but letting people die before her face without one attempt to save them. In which strain he went on until Mary asked, at last, what Bessy was really doing.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," said William. "She stands in the old porch, with her arms folded, just like those images that bear the weight of a doorway on their heads—Caryatides, I think people call them—and though I saw she was staring out into the orchard, where the children were running about—bless their little hearts!—



she never stirred a step to go to them, nor threw a fir apple, nor pulled a flower to please them. I can't think what she is made of."

"Well, never mind, William dear. Some day, perhaps, she'll have children of her own, and then we shall see the difference."

"But there *should* be no difference in such a case. That's just what vexes me—people living only for themselves and their own, and letting every thing else go to the ——."

"Hush, William! Don't talk like that. Perhaps even Bessy will come round some of these days. But I do wish she would look to the children ever such a little, so as to let Nancy come to me sometimes. Besides which, it would do her own heart good."

"It would. I declare her conduct is not decent, to say nothing of being womanly. I'll go myself, and ask her now, this very minute. I'll *make* her do something."

"Stop, William! Oh, pray stop! You'll distress me—almost kill me, if you do ask her. That *is* one of the things I can not bear, indeed! So come back directly. And now, while I hold your hand, promise me this—that you never will, for me or mine, ask services from your own family which they have not first offered of their own accord. If you wish me to recover, William, promise me this. I must have your promise now."

William did promise, for he saw how much his wife was excited and disturbed by the bare idea of compulsory service rendered to herself; and when he thought the matter over more coolly, he scarcely wondered at her strong feelings on this point. It became his great object now to try to soothe the agitation he had caused, and while he did so in his kindest, gentlest manner, the door of the room was burst open, and in rushed their



rosy, happy boy, dragging his little sister by the hand, evidently come to tell of some wonderful event which animated his whole frame with triumph and delight.

The purport of the boy's story was that he had been riding — riding with Uncle Ben on the pony, and that even little sissy had been lifted up, and "held fast — so fast! Wasn't it good of Uncle Ben?" exclaimed the boy; and Mary said it was very good, for her heart filled with gratitude at this weak moment, until the tears stood in her eyes; and William thought within himself what a blessed thing is kindness, when it can reach a human heart in this way!

But this was not all. In the afternoon of the same day Nancy, the nurse-maid, came to tell her mistress that Miss Ashton, all of her own accord, had taken the children out with her into the wood — baby and all; and, after inquiring how long she might keep them, had promised to bring them back safe and sound at the right time.

Again Mary felt the hot tears stealing off from her eyes upon the pillow, in which she half buried her face; and when she had lifted up her heart to God in thankfulness and prayer that this might be the beginning of a happy interchange of good-will and mutual services, she turned to her servant with a brighter smile than her countenance had worn for many days, and gave cheerful directions as to all she had so sadly wanted to have done in and about the room.

If Mary's quick perceptions could have penetrated to the outskirts of that little wood, into which their new and able nurse had promised to take the children, she would have seen a woman's form, at once strong and nimble, wending its way along a grassy path, over stile and brook, and then pushing carefully back the branches of the trees and sprays of bramble, so that nothing hurt-



ful might touch a little treasure coiled safely and tenderly within those powerful arms ; while the small party behind went on wondering exceedingly, and scarcely venturing to ask where they were going, now stepped with timid feet over the plank which crossed a tiny stream, and now gladly accepted the help of that outstretched hand which lifted them occasionally over some difficulty too great for them to surmount. The mother would have seen that, after a little scrambling, a pleasant opening in the wood was found, where the stems of some fallen trees afforded a convenient resting-place ; and that here the baby was carefully unfolded, its little face examined with curious eyes, its tiny hands softly touched, and then a finger offered that the small ones might clasp. She would have heard, about this time, a perfect Babel of nonsense chattered to the happy little thing, while the older children were shown where the pretty moss was lying, and told of the birds, how they built their nests, and where ; and when all these wonders had been expatiated upon, and all hands filled, and more than filled, with little peeping daisies, and gray lichen, and tender moss, and the happy infant had begun to sleep, she would have heard the soft trilling of as sweet a song as ever wood-nymph listened to ; and then, if she had watched closely and listened well, she would have been sensible that the song faltered in its rich full cadence ; that the fine head drooped ; and over that carefully-shrouded little form, as it nestled closely to the heart-warmth it was used to, there were falling large heavy tears like a perfect shower.

But Mary's eye saw not those tears—her ears heard neither the laughter nor the song. She only guessed at a good deal of what was transpiring, and lay with thankful heart and happy feelings, awaiting the joyful announcement, on her children's return, that they had been



into "Oh, such a beautiful place, and that Aunt Bessy had been so kind!"

But Aunt Bessy took care not to come into the way of hearing these praises and comments herself. With that strange perverseness which characterized her, she sent a servant to request that Nancy would come and take the children; and when Nancy appeared, she complained of being tired to death, and said how she hated babies and children in general, and how she wondered that any body could endure them, until the girl, half vexed, was very nearly saying she would take good care she never was troubled with *her* children again. On carrying the baby up stairs, however, Nancy was astonished to hear the account given by the other children, who had rushed in before her to tell their story of delight.

Mary was most anxious to teach her children to be grateful, and she began with this teaching from their early infancy, for gratitude must always be *taught*. It can not spring spontaneously in minds incapable, through inexperience, of forming any idea of what is actually done and suffered by others. Why will not all mothers do as Mary did, and thus provide for their children the frequent recurrence of one of the most happy and most blessed emotions of which the human heart is capable?

By inspiring in her children this tendency to feel grateful, and also to express gratitude for any service done, or kindness shown them, Mary provided for them friends wherever they might be; and even here, among these strange people, the habits of her children began to make way for them into the hearts of their relatives, which had at first appeared to be so obstinately closed against all their advances.

Uncle Ben, the youth already described as wayward and idle, had probably never, in all his life before, enjoy-



ed the pleasure of being thanked so heartily and feelingly as he was by the children whom he had indulged with the rare excitement of a ride. As the owner of the pony, too, he was quite a hero in their eyes; and when the smaller of the two children, the little girl who could not speak, pursed up her tiny mouth with the offer of a kiss by way of thanking Uncle Ben, and he stooped down, almost blushing, to receive this innocent return, which was all she had to offer, it is quite probable that the boy was conscious of something more like *worth* within himself than he was accustomed to experience.

Indeed, nobody ever thought of worth attaching in any way to poor Ben. Scarcely was any credit allowed him for one single good quality. Bessy seldom spoke to him but with jeering and scorn; and if he escaped a box on the ears from her powerful hand, when he met her in any convenient place, he might esteem himself fortunate. With the father he fared even worse; while the mother, who scrupulously abstained from meddling in his defense in public, did sometimes find an opportunity for a little private petting, especially when he had done something worse than usual, or conducted himself altogether with less regard to propriety.

It was a sad spectacle to Mary to see a boy just verging upon manhood thus driven, as she thought he must be by such treatment, into the high road to ruin; but earnestly as she desired to hold out a helping hand to win him back, all such effort on her part seemed to be entirely out of the question at present.

On these subjects Mary pondered deeply while she lay upon her sick-bed. If once the way should open before her, she would be prompt and willing enough to do good in any manner that might be possible to her; and surely, she thought, the time would come when she might help a little toward getting all this wrong set right. She



must be still and wait. Yes, again and again she told her quickly-beating heart to be still. She thought over some of the most striking instances she had read of openings occurring at the very time when there was least ground for hope. She reasoned with herself upon the folly of supposing that her feeble agency could be required in such a cause. She knew well—no one could know better—that she possessed no extraordinary gifts or talents to render her more capable than others for helping on God's work in benefiting and saving his poor erring creatures. And yet the impulse, the almost burning impulse, remained the same—that if He would only give her strength and wisdom for the task, it must, and should be done.

Why was this impulse given? That question can only be answered by telling what Mary did.

#### CHAPTER IV.

BEFORE Mary had quite recovered her usual strength her husband was called from home for a few days. There was business to be done in which the assistance of a lawyer was required, and old Mr. Ashton always preferred that his nephew Peter should be consulted in every thing connected with the affairs of the farm.

William would have chosen almost any one before his cousin Peter; but there seemed to have been established a kind of intimacy between the uncle and nephew, which William could neither disregard nor understand. So, having other business to transact by the way, he set off on a journey of two or three days, leaving his wife with considerable regret, because he knew there was no one at home who would take care that she did not exert herself too much; nor was it very probable that any one there would make the least attempt either



to lighten her labors, or cheer her solitude during his absence.

And very solitary Mary did feel herself when thus left, the more so because the first recovery from illness is generally a time when the spirits sink under accumulated duties, which have to be resumed without adequate strength for their performance. It is also a time when most things appear to be thrown into almost irreclaimable disorder, when more has to be done than it is possible to get through with, and when life itself seems to have been going backward instead of forward, while ability to gather up what has been lost is entirely wanting.

Little did Bessy Ashton, in her idle and care-nothing state, imagine what a comfort a few kind words would have been in a silent chamber not very distant from her own, or what help a useful hand and strong arm might have rendered where help was sorely needed. She did not even go to see what could be done in that quarter of the house which was occupied by her brother's family, but kept aloof in a strange unsisterly manner; while the mother made only those short periodical visits of inquiry which tell but too plainly of the irksomeness of remaining, and the satisfaction of getting away.

Mary was miserable—so miserable that she thought she must be growing wicked. She reproached herself severely for giving way to feelings of discontent. She tried to beguile the time with her children, but the weather had become beautifully fine, and they liked to be out all day, and she liked it for them. So she sat in her own room stitching and mending, and sometimes crying, until, one particularly mild and pleasant afternoon, she made up her mind to try and get out to a meeting, which she knew would be held that evening in an adjacent village. It was but a short distance to walk across the fields, and Mary felt sure it would do her



good. For her heart was wearied with these godless people, and she wanted to hear something about the eternal interests of her own soul, and of those of her fellow-beings. She wanted, in fact, to hear about her Father in heaven, and his goodness to rebellious man—to hear something like the communion of grateful hearts one with another, and all with his Holy Spirit—something of that faith in a blessed Savior which would have called forth mockery and scorn, had she spoken of it herself among the people by whom she was surrounded.

So, whether prudently or not, Mary determined to go to the meeting. She had much to return thanks for on her own recovery, and restoration to her family; and she wanted to pour out the feelings of her soul among those who recognized the same hand of mercy in all the personal dispensations, whether joyous or grievous, of their earthly lot.

To her own servant alone Mary communicated where she was going, and by what way she should return, so that, when the children were disposed of for the night, the girl might step out and see after her a little by the way; as, although she was strong in her resolution, she had not entire confidence in her ability to walk, and she thought a companion might, perhaps, be serviceable to her in returning home.

The evening was mild and lovely when Mary set out. Nancy and the children accompanied her part of the way, leaving her seated on a stile, for she had allowed herself ample time to rest; and the grass felt so pleasant to her feet, and the air was so balmy, and altogether it was so delightful to her to be out again, to hear the birds singing their evening songs, and to see the trees waving in a gentle breeze; it was so cheering to be out again with Nature, and with Nature's God, that Mary felt her faith, and hope, and charity alike renewed as she gazed around



her, and drank in the beauty of the surrounding scene, and breathed again the breath of renovated health.

It was almost as good, she thought, as the prayer-meeting to which she was going, to sit there in that quiet place, and look abroad upon the beautiful world again, after having been so long shut up in a dark and gloomy chamber. But no; there was something in Christian fellowship which she longed for besides; and since she could have both, she rose up and went again on her way, scarcely wearied at all with the exercise, she had taken it so gently and with such frequent intervals of rest.

The cordiality with which Mary was greeted at the meeting was written upon many a homely countenance, and many a toil-worn hand was stretched out to welcome her among that earnest little company. Her peculiar circumstances, and especially her recent illness, were remembered in the quaint language of their prayers; and Mary bore without flinching the somewhat close and familiar allusions made to her own affairs, while commending her especially to Divine mercy and guidance. The character of the family into which she had entered was well known to these people, and they had little scruple in speaking openly of what they considered the perilous and wanton manner in which they were "sinning away their day of grace." But all this was accompanied with such earnest and heart-warm entreaties that the wanderers might yet be reclaimed and brought into the fold, that, revolting as this familiar style of address might have been to Mary under other circumstances, it only reminded her now of the mode of worship to which she had been accustomed since the days of her childhood; and she knew, besides, that it proceeded from a spirit of childlike confidence and trust, such as she believed to be the only right spirit in which to approach the throne of



mercy. The words were of little consequence to Mary—the spirit was all; and while she listened and prayed along with those who offered up these fervent petitions, a feeling of resignation, and even contentment, diffused itself throughout her whole frame; so that she began to feel, toward the conclusion of the service, as if fresh supplies of strength, as well as willingness, were given her, both to do and to suffer whatever might be appointed by her Heavenly Father as the especial service required at her hands.

Mary forgot too much, while thus engaged, that she had a feeble body to drag about with her still—that all the service of the Christian is not a spiritual service. The low room was close and crowded, and she was sensible, at last, of a sudden faintness, which made her rise up before the others to go away.

Few things could be more uncongenial to Mary than a *scene*, with herself for the heroine. She therefore said not a word about her feelings, but, moving softly and silently out of the room, made her way as quickly as she could into the open air. She had but two or three cottages to pass before the path turned off into the fields; and she was able to reach the side of a little brook which she had to cross in returning home. Here she sat down upon a stone, bathed her face and hands in the water, and soon felt refreshed. Her strength, however, so nearly failed her, that when she rose to cross the bridge, she was obliged to hold by the side rails, and had begun to look about her, in the hope of seeing her servant come to meet her, when a man's figure close beside her made her start; but as he must have come along the path which Nancy was to take, she ventured to ask him if he had seen a young woman walking that way.

Whether there was something in Mary's voice which indicated her weakness, or whether the light still left in



the western sky showed some alarming paleness in her face, the man looked at her earnestly; and after replying to her question that he had seen no such person, he still hesitated to pass, but with his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon her face, said kindly,

“I’m afraid you are ill. Can I be of any service to you?”

Mary felt exceedingly embarrassed; but, with a cheerful smile, declined the offered help, saying she should do very well if she walked slowly, and that her servant would be sure to meet her. But the man, or *gentleman*—she did not know which it was—refused to leave her so, saying he would walk a little way behind her, if that would be more agreeable.

“No, no,” said Mary; “if you help me, we will go together; but the fact is, I don’t know who you are, though you seem very kind, and I am sure I thank you very much.”

“I am afraid your knowing who I am would scarcely make my assistance more agreeable to you,” said the man.

Mary looked for the first time full into his face. It was turned toward the west, and she saw those splendid eyes of which her husband had spoken, and she knew also by the soft tones of the voice who it was.

“Ah!” she said kindly, and at the same time holding out her hand, “I believe I *do* know. Are you not my cousin? I am Mary Ashton, William Ashton’s wife.”

“I knew you must be William’s wife,” said the stranger, averting his face and standing back, without having taken the offered hand.

“Let us meet as cousins, then,” said Mary; “and as I mean what I say, I will ask you now to walk with me a little way, and even to let me lean upon your arm, for I have been very ill, and am not quite strong yet.”



"I know you have," said the man; "but, weak as you are, I don't think you would like to lean upon my arm."

"Yes, I should, if you will let me. Why not?"

"Because you have been to a Methodist meeting, and I have been—"

"Never mind where. It is where we are going, not where we have been, that makes the great difference."

"With us I should think that must be, indeed, the great difference. But if you don't mind it, here's my arm, and I hope you'll lean upon it as much as you can. I'm sure I should like to help you, for they say you are very good and kind, only we may chance to meet somebody you know."

"I don't care if we meet the whole world."

"I think you would care, though."

"No, I shouldn't."

"Then you don't know all."

"I know a good deal; and I know you are my husband's cousin, the son of respectable parents, and especially of a good mother."

"The greater my shame."

"Oh, don't think of that!"

"What is there for me to think of besides?"

"Of the way back again out of shame, and out of misery."

"There is no way back for such as me."

"Don't talk in that manner. If you help me with your arm, you must not distress me with your words."

"No, no. It was very wrong of me. I will talk of something else. How is William? and how does he like the farm? William and I were schoolfellows, and great cronies once."

"So he tells me."

"What! does he ever talk about old times, and about



me, now? Only to abuse me, I suppose. Indeed, what else can he do?"

"I wish you would come and see us sometimes."

"Ha! ha! That *is* good! What! *I* put my head into the old house that ought to have been my own, and call William master there, as I suppose he will be soon?"

"It won't be William's fault if he is. But I don't think he ever will be that."

"How so?"

"He has too strong a sense of right."

"Whew!"

"I am talking, however, without understanding much about the matter. William and I are both in the dark. He only came here to help his father to manage the farm. He was living away, you know, when his uncle died, and no one could be more astonished than William was when he found how things were left."

"And where is he gone now?"

"To see Peter, and to settle some business of his father's with him."

"Oh! he'll learn enough there. Peter will tell him. Peter will make him acquainted with all sorts of smooth-going facts. He'll have a reason for any thing, and an excuse for any thing—most especially a reason why black should be white, and an excuse for it not being quite white."

"But perhaps William won't be come over so easily as that."

"Yes, he will, because he has an honest heart of his own, and such are the easiest to come over by men like Peter. They don't suspect, and so they get easily duped. They are not knavish, and slippery, and false themselves, so they never think other people are knaves—not such knaves as Peter, at least. But what's the matter? Oh,



I'm talking too roughly! Do pray forgive me. Sit down here just a moment, and I'll fetch some water. Why, she's fainting, I do declare! Oh, Mary!—my cousin—you angel of a woman, what must I do?"

Mary was not so far gone but that these words struck almost ludicrously upon her ear; and, with a sudden flush, she immediately recovered herself sufficiently to smile at what her cousin was saying—so sudden in its change of tone, as well as sense, and so absurd as the expressions sounded to Mary in their application to herself.

"There!" said Mary, making a determined effort to rouse herself. "I never fainted in my life, and I'm not going to faint now, only I believe we must not talk in this way any more. Call me any thing you like, however silly, but don't let us enter upon these matters until I am strong again. Some things touch one more than others. I have been thinking a great deal while I was ill and lonely, and some time—I don't know when— But oh! I do wish that William and I could see you, and know more about you."

"I tell you what, Mary—I suppose I may call you Mary?"

"Oh yes, to be sure."

"Well then, Mary, to know but a little about me is far better for you both than to know a great deal."

"But if *we* don't think so?"

"You would think so if you only knew one half."

"Well, then, we won't know any thing that is past and gone. I don't care about that. I should be sorry to be told. But there is a future, you know, for every body. It is *that* that I want to talk to you about."

"Do you walk this way ever?"

"Yes, very often—almost every week."

"If you would let me, I think I should like to meet



you sometimes, and walk with you part of the way home."

"I *should* like it—*do*."

"A pretty game for me to be playing, truly—to wait for my cousin's wife coming out of a Methodist meeting—such a scamp as I am! And the summer nights at this time will be as light as day, and lots of people will see us together. No, I'm quite sure you wouldn't like it."

"Yes, I should. At any rate, I'll tell you if I don't. There might be circumstances under which I should not like it, certainly."

"Yes, I know—I know all about *that*."

"Well, then, it is agreed between us?"

"Under your promise that you'll tell me faithfully if you don't like it, it is."

"I do promise to tell you with perfect sincerity if any thing comes in the way to make me not wish it."

"Yes, you do well to say *wish* instead of like. I knew you couldn't *like* it."

"You are very critical about words. But I think it best that you and I should be perfectly sincere with one another, and therefore I will say *wish* instead of like. But now we must say good-night, for I see my servant in the distance."

"There now! That's how it is, and that's how it will always be. The moment any body sees us together, you'll be ashamed of your companion."

"How absurd! I never for a moment thought of such a thing. I only wanted to spare you any further trouble. You don't know me, indeed, if you think I'm a woman of that kind. I don't think the fear of man is much before my eyes, and I'm sure the fear of woman isn't."

"That's bravely said. But are you really better now, and won't you faint again?"



"A great deal better, thank you, and not likely to faint, I hope, ever as long as I live. You may say good-night with the greatest confidence, as far as that goes."

"Good-night, then, Cousin Mary; but—but—don't go just yet. I'm thinking what a happy fellow William must be."

"Not always, I assure you. A woman with a great spirit like mine can hardly manage so as not to vex her husband sometimes."

"But he must be a happy fellow, though, for all that."

"Perhaps you'll be just as happy some time, or more so."

"Oh, Mary! you don't know what you are saying."

"Yes, I do, quite well."

"*Me* happy!"

"Yes, you, with a good wife of your own, and children about your knees."

"Mary—Mary—you're making a fool of me! Why, look here. I'm a fool, indeed. I never thought you would wring a tear from these miserable eyes. What *can* you mean?"

"I mean this, my poor cousin—that there is a good God above us all, who knows our temptations and our weaknesses, even better than we know them ourselves; and because he sees us all as we really are, he sees that we are all sinners—sinners in high places as well as low—sinners when honored, as well as when despised—all sinners, unless we come to him, and believe, and repent, and accept the forgiveness which he offers just in his own way, and upon his own terms: and I mean that he is as ready to pardon the poor outcast on these conditions, as he is to pardon the richest, or the loftiest, or the man with the best name, who may have sinned, as the world calls it, but a *little*. Ah, my cousin! there is no setting bounds to the mercy of God's forgiveness."



For what else did he send his Son into the world, but that the vilest, the most destitute and ruined, might come to him, and find peace and joy, and live forevermore with him? Think of these things sometimes. Do promise me that you will. There must be thinking times even for you. Take your Bible, if you have one, and read about the thief on the cross. It was not too late even for him. But, cousin, one word more. Have you a Bible?"

"I have my mother's Bible—the one she gave me only the day before she died."

"You could not have a better—none so good for you. It must surely bring a holy message with it. Good-night once more."

"Good-night."

## CHAPTER V.

MARY was not sorry now that she had been left at home alone. Had William been with her, this interview with his cousin might not have taken place; for, though he never attended the village meetings with her, he was in the habit of meeting her on her way home, and, in her present weak state, would certainly not have allowed her to walk so far without his assistance.

Whatever the interview might lead to, Mary was deeply interested in what had taken place. She was affected even beyond what this slight and accidental intercourse might appear to warrant; for there are natures so constituted that they seem to flow together instinctively, irrespective of any proportionate amount of good or evil attaching to them individually. Thus we find, with some excellent persons, that there are certain characters, far indeed from being excellent like themselves, upon whom they will not and can not turn their



backs. They know what they are, and feel more than others both the shame and the sorrow of which their wrong conduct is the cause, but they can not give them up; while, on the other hand, there are some very good persons—professors, it may be, of the same religious belief with themselves—perhaps members of the same church—with whom they never harmonize, and never would, to the end of time.

It is not, strictly speaking, either love or hate—scarcely even liking or disliking—which makes this difference; but rather a mutual instinct of nature, which enables the former class of persons to understand each other, so that comparatively few words are necessary to their intercourse. They can go down at once with each other to any depth of human feeling, or they can rise by the force of the same sympathy to any height. Thus it is that they have the power of being essentially useful to each other; or, alas! if evil tendencies predominate with both, to what frightful ruin may they not draw each other down!

Mary was keenly sensible of something of this kind in connection with her outcast cousin. She had felt painfully the want of it in the family at the farm; for, though the old man appeared to take cordially to her, she could not but be aware of the shallowness of their intercourse, founded, as she knew it to be, upon her own natural cheerfulness and apparent good-humor; nor could she fail to understand how the first act of plain dealing on her part would, in all probability, cause a lasting separation between them, if not something worse. For herself she would have cared little; but, on her husband's account, it was of the utmost importance that cordiality should be maintained throughout the whole family, and particularly between his father and him.

Thus far all had gone tolerably well. Almost the en-



tire management of the farm was committed to William's charge; but the subject of money was still a mystery into which he was not permitted to penetrate. Like many other farmers of his class, Mr. Ashton kept no regular accounts—at least, none that William could obtain a sight of; and the conclusion at which the son at last arrived was, that his father's case was only one of extensive and long-continued muddling; and all who have had much experience in business know well that money needs no surer channel for escape.

During the short journey that William made to see his cousin Peter, however, he obtained, as he thought, some light on this mysterious subject, which he was not slow to communicate to his wife. Of course there was much to talk over on his return, and Mary was anxious to know all that had transpired, especially what Peter had said on one point which it was William's business to lay before him. Mary and her husband were both anxious that a sum of money should be raised for enabling the older brother to settle respectably in some distant quarter of the world, and it was their object to induce the younger and more prosperous one to advance this sum. This scheme, however, had fallen quite to the ground. It was the old story, William said, of Tom's bad conduct—the uselessness of advancing money to any one whose habits were like his; and, finally—William said this vexed him more than all—the old pretense of not being in circumstances himself to be able to throw any thing away upon a mere experiment. If, indeed, he could believe—if he could venture to believe that his poor brother had seen the error of his ways—

“With a great deal more in that strain,” said William, “to which I replied ‘that Tom had seen the error of his ways clearly enough; but what then? What was there for the poor fellow to turn to, supposing he did



leave off his bad habits? Once give a man a lift, set him fairly on his legs, and then if he won't stand, give him up. But poor Tom never had a lift—never since the time he was a boy. He never learned a business regularly, and he never had any allowance made him, so that he could say he had a shilling of his own. If that isn't enough to ruin a man, I don't know what is.' ”

“But, Mary,” William began, with a look of sharpened interest, “I do believe I've found something out. I begin to see a little, I think, how things stand. You know I had to call at the bank at Whinston as I went through. The last thing father said to me when I was setting off was, ‘You may ask for my book while you are at the bank.’ I did so, and when the book was wrapped up and sealed, a thought struck me—I'll see what's in it. Now, if I had opened it myself, father mightn't have liked it; so I said to the clerk, ‘Just let me see, will you, whether a small sum has been entered which I have some doubt about?’ You see the people thought nothing about this, because they know I do all father's business for him now, and it was true besides; so there was no lie told, you know. They opened the book just as I wanted them to, and I took it very knowingly into my hand, and looked; and what do you think I saw? No less than a hundred pounds paid to Peter Ashton down at Christmas. I was aghast; but I looked back, and, true as I'm alive, there was another hundred not longer since than last Michaelmas. I was obliged to be quick, for it did not do for me to be examining the book farther back than I might seem to have any business with, while the folks in the bank had their eyes upon me; so, saying I had found what I wanted, I gave it back to them to wrap up and seal again, and nobody took the least notice, that I could discover. Now, Mary, what do you think of that?”



"I think it looks very strange, William."

"I'll tell you what *I* think."

"What is that?"

"I think father pays some yearly sum, agreed upon between themselves, to Peter for holding the farm."

"But the farm was left him by will, was it not?"

"Yes. But then Peter and he were always too intimate a great deal for my liking; and who knows what scheme they might have been after between themselves? More than all, I should not wonder a bit if the farm will never come into my hands either, but go to Peter by my father's will. I'll know that, however, some of these days, or my name's not William Ashton."

"How can you know it?"

"I'll make my father tell me what he has done, or is going to do, about his will. I'll have all fair and straight about that, or—"

"Don't be too hasty, William—don't hurry the matter on. Let us go quietly to work—above all, let us do right, and then all things will come right in the end."

"It strikes me they are very far from being right now."

"Let us get to know more, and so be very sure of what we are about."

"And how are we to get to know, I wonder, when every body is so false and so deep? Oh! Mary, it's a dreadful thing to feel toward one's own father as I do to mine. Any thing a man may fall into unawares, or even by being overtempted, I can make allowance for, if he is open and sincere about it. I could make allowance for my father above most men, for I don't think he ever saw very clearly right from wrong in small matters. But then he should not have deceived *me*. He should not have brought us here as he did. I begin to wish we had never come."



“We came with good intentions, William, and we don’t know yet what we may have come for; there may be some hidden good in it yet.”

“Ah! that’s the way you always take things, Mary; spiritualizing about *hidden good*, when there’s nothing but evil, and wickedness, and devilry, that I can see. I declare I shall go distracted with your Methodist talk, for it seems to me to have no sense in it at all—none, at least, that I can discover.”

“But you won’t be vexed with me, William. Why, just look here!” and Mary laughingly showed him how much too wide for her was a gown she was taking off, and which had fitted her well before her illness. William was subdued in an instant, for he saw how pale she looked, and how unfit altogether for rough treatment or harsh words.

Although for that night William’s tendency to violence was overborne by his feelings of pity and tenderness for his wife, his anger against his father returned again with the business of the following day, and, indeed, much more frequently than was conducive to the peace of the household. Before the discovery made at the bank, he had imagined nothing more than weakness on his father’s part as the ground of a strongly-complicated condition of his affairs; and the very fact of being requested by his father to come and assist him was, to William, an unquestionable proof of confidence, which of itself insured his own good will in return. Now, instead of this confidence, he had reason to believe himself a dupe, brought under his father’s roof for the sole purpose of making some present profit out of his usefulness, with no consideration for the welfare of his family, or for his own future good in any way. This was too much to endure with patience, and more especially when, to these mortifying circumstances, was added the galling



thought that his cousin Peter was at the bottom of the whole scheme, and that he, and he alone, was the only person likely to profit by it.

It certainly required a state of mind much more subdued than that of William Ashton to bear this with equanimity; and once having been brought to doubt his father's sincerity and honorable dealing toward himself, he had little toleration for all those minor faults and weaknesses which, under any circumstances, would have demanded a large amount of charity and forbearance.

Between William and his father were now sometimes heard high words, which Mary listened to with mingled terror and distress; while Mrs. Ashton went about the house murmuring her belief that somebody had been meddling. She had no idea of any other way in which that outward quiet, which it had been the study of her life to maintain, could be disturbed; and of course, in these conclusions, her mind reverted to Mary as most likely to be the moving cause. Whether Mrs. Ashton really knew what jarring interests there were within her household—what dangerous matters there might be in a quiescent state, or what explosions would be likely to attend any violent commotion among these elements of strife, was only known to herself; but one thing was evident, that if ever the world was to be made better—nay, even if the wrong existing in her own little world of home was to be set right, she was not the woman to do it.

Dark, indeed, and threatening grew the atmosphere by which Mary was surrounded now, in a home that looked peaceful enough in its outward aspect. The worst feature to her, in the present state of her domestic affairs, was, that her husband now lost his temper so often, and spoke of his father in such a manner, that she became painfully conscious of something like growing



enmity between them ; and while her heart sank within her to witness their words and looks, she also began to wish that they had never come to live beneath the same roof.

Among other grounds of complaint, William discovered that his father now often lost himself in fits of intemperance, which Mrs. Ashton had at first concealed from him under the plea of indisposition. This, he thought, accounted in great measure for the failure of his father's mind, and the general deterioration of his character. But Mary thought there was a deeper cause than this, for her eyes were beginning to discover what her husband's, under the excitement of angry feeling, failed to perceive.

Mary, however, was not without help in the unraveling of some of the strange entanglements by which they were surrounded. There was but one person in the world at once both able and willing to afford this help. It was Mrs. Mason, the nurse, to whom Mary applied. Remembering much of what this woman had told her of the family, and knowing her to be open to communication on the subject which was always near her heart, Mary had determined within herself to see the nurse again, and to elicit from her information more direct than she had yet communicated.

Mrs. Mason lived at the village to which Mary went to attend the meetings, and she was in the habit of sometimes looking in upon her on these occasions. When the day came around again, she therefore allowed herself a spare half-hour before the meeting, in order that she might make the inquiries which it was of so much importance that she should have clearly answered. It was not Mary's habit to go round about any business which she undertook. She had a natural shrinking from all by-play, or underhand dealing, both in herself and



others. She was not going, therefore, to fish out what she wanted to know, but to ask directly, and at once, such questions as might guide her own judgment in forming an opinion.

Still something might be necessary as a prelude, especially as the subject, being closely connected with family matters, was scarcely of a nature to be entered upon abruptly. So when Mary, on stepping into the cottage, found Mrs. Mason busily engaged in ironing shirts, she said, after the first salutation,

“I did not know that you took in washing, nurse.”

“No more I do,” said Mrs. Mason, “unless one may call it taking in, to wash a shirt now and then for a gentleman; or for one that should be a gentleman,” she said in a lower tone, as she hung one of the shirts to the fire, and then came back with a sigh to resume her occupation.

“I suppose you have been mending too,” observed Mary, “for I see some busy hand has been at work here.”

“Yes,” replied the woman; “it’s as much as needle and thread can do to make these old things hold together; but still they’re fine and white, and once they’re well washed, and well got up, they look pretty decent still—more so a good deal, to my fancy, than them calico things. The puzzle is where to get more, when these won’t hang together any longer.”

“Ah!” said Mary, “I see the mark. I guessed all the while who you were working for. Does he lodge with you?”

“No, poor soul, not lodge, exactly. He comes here sometimes, and sits a bit; and when he hasn’t another roof to put his head under, he knows very well he may find one here. I’ve a comfortable little room here, you see, on the ground floor; and I’ve put a bed up in it lately, thinking it might be convenient sometimes.”



“And you wash and mend for him, do you, nurse?”

“Yes, I do what I can for him, poor dear, for his mother’s sake. I shall always see him decently cared for, so long as I’ve the power to help in it. But, you see, I can’t make his outside clothes for him. A new coat, such as he ought to wear, would cost a sight o’ money; and yet that’s what he wants most. A hat—a good new hat—*she* has managed for him, poor soul; but a coat, I fancy, would be beyond her means as well as mine.”

“Her! Who do you mean?”

“Why, Miss Ashton, to be sure. Who else should I mean?”

“Does Bessy take that care about him, then?”

“Bless your soul! it’s wonderful the care she takes—it’s wonderful the things she thinks about, and does for him. It’s my belief she would slip off her own shoes, and go barefoot, to save his poor, tired, wandering feet, any day.”

“And yet she seems always so careless and so indifferent.”

“Don’t you believe it of her. It’s all put on. You should see her as I see her sometimes.”

“Well, I suppose love can transform any body, but to me there is not a colder-hearted creature on the face of the earth than Bessy. I don’t blame her, mind. She owes me nothing; only I do wish sometimes we could be better friends.”

“Oh! let her alone, and you’ll find her out some time.”

“Perhaps she does not like me—does not believe in me, nor trust me.”

“I don’t know that, in regard to you in partic’lar; but it’s nat’ral enough that she should look upon Mr. William as coming to the farm to keep it out of the



hands of them that have the best right to it—the only real right to it, if every body had their own.”

“I see what you mean, though, strange to say, I had never thought of that before. I should not wonder, after all, if Bessy should find herself entirely mistaken. William begins to think the farm is disposed of already.”

“*Begins* to think so, does he?”

“Yes, and he thinks so more and more.”

“If he had ever asked me, I could have told him something about that matter. But it was not my business to be interfering.”

“You lived with Mr. Ashton at the time of his death. Was he long ill?”

“No, not ill exactly. He fell off in strength, and stooped a good deal, and went about like an old man before his time. And then he had a stroke, but nobody would hear of it. There were those, you see, that didn’t want to hear of it. They wanted to make out that he was all right, and clear, and knew what he was about when he made his will. And so he did in one sense. He knew he was doing wrong by his own child. I heard enough about that when it was done. It was pitiful to hear how the poor old man called out for his son Thomas, and said he had taken the bread out of his mouth, and that God would never forgive him for what he had done.”

“And you were witness to all that?”

“Witness! I could stand to it on my oath in a court of law, that if ever man repented of what he had done, my old master repented of making that will.”

“Did any body hear him talk in that way besides you?”

“Yes, Peter and his uncle both heard him, times and often; but they said he was raving then—quite out of his mind. And then they found out he had had a stroke;



but they said it was after making his will, not before. I don't say but he might have had one, only I'll stick to it it was the second, not the first, and neither time was his senses took away—not quite."

"Then it was not he himself that turned against poor Tom?"

"He! Bless you! he was only too fond of him. He got vexed with him sometimes as any body would; for they're a sore plague, is them boys that won't go steady. I once had one myself, you know. I know what it is. But he's dead and gone, poor dear—died in a strange land; and I sometimes think, when I mend and patch for my master's son, how I should have blessed the hand that did the same for mine."

"Yes, nurse, and you will be blessed, depend upon it. I don't believe there ever was a kind action done, not so much as a tear shed, even for one of these stray sheep, but it had a blessing with it one way or another."

"Then I think, Mrs. William, you'll come in for a share of blessing yourself."

"Why, what have I done? I only wish I could do something."

"Done! Only think of that young man coming in to tell me, as proud as a prince, that you had taken hold of his arm, and spoken kindly to him! Why, I believe that very act of yours has kept him sober all the rest of the week, only I rather looked for him last night, to be sure, and he never came. You never saw any body so set up as he was."

"Does nobody ever speak kindly to him, do you think, then?"

"Very few people, I should say, beyond Miss Ashton and me. And yet he was a tenderly brought-up child, and a good child, too, when he was very young—maybe a little, just a little bit too much indulged in having what he liked."



“By his mother you mean?”

“By both father and mother, for they were both alike, always of one mind—such a happy couple while she lived!”

“Your master must have been a sadly-altered man after he lost his wife.”

“He wasn’t like the same man at all. I should say he had never been a strong-minded man, but good-tempered, and always kindly disposed. He was led by her in almost every thing, though he didn’t know it; and she was never the woman to let it be seen. When she was gone, however, any body might tell how it had been. He was lost—quite lost. And then, as the boys grew up, Peter got the upper hand, and vexed poor Tom, and drove him into bad ways. And then Peter went tale-telling to his father, and pretending he was sorry. It’s my belief he was glad all the time. But, you see, these things grew by little and little, and we were all a long time finding Peter out. He was always a smooth-tongued ’un, and some people haven’t found him out yet.”

“I should think that affair of the will must have shown pretty clearly what he was.”

“Yes; but nobody knew about that except me, and I didn’t know rightly at the time what they were after; only by putting things together since, I’ve got a pretty good idea.”

“One thing puzzles me very much, nurse. What could be Peter’s motive for getting the property left to his uncle, instead of himself?”

“Why, don’t you see? Peter was always one for standing well with people. His living, you know, depends mainly on that. Now, if he had got his father to leave him the farm, it would have been seen through at once. Perhaps even his own father would have seen



through that, for he always thought him hard upon his brother. So Peter and his uncle laid their heads together, and the farm was to be left out and out to the present Mr. Ashton—that's what stood in the will, and the will, you know, had to be read; and in this way it didn't sound so plain that Peter had any thing to do with it. But then I've an idea that this was done under a promise from Mr. Ashton that he would leave all, at his death, to Peter; for by that time they might think the brother would have ruined himself outright, and so the thing would look reasonable enough. Now mind—I don't say I *know* all this to be so, but it's my firm belief that some plotting, and planning, and wickedness of this kind has been going on between these two. Like to their like, you see—begging your pardon, as I should, since one of 'em's your husband's father."

"I think I see into it myself," said Mary, very gravely; "but what to do I don't so well see."

"Ay, that's the question," said the nurse. "I suppose, law being law, nothing can turn it."

"Do you think, nurse," said Mary again, after thinking a little while, "do you think you could take your oath that your master was forced into making that will?"

"That's a ticklish point. You know there's many ways of forcing without laying violent hands upon a person. There's a kind of force, as one may say, in being overpersuaded."

"But you could declare that he had had a stroke before that?"

"Yes, that I could, for I was with him myself the morning after, and helped him to get up; and he could no more use his left hand than a dead man could, for at least a week after he was took, and he kind o' dragged his left foot too."

"But his head—his mind—how was that?"



“Queerish; not quite right, nor altogether wrong.”

“He knew what he was about, I suppose?”

“In some sense he did. But he was not himself neither; seemed frightened like—I don’t know how.”

“What did the doctor think?”

“Well, I was witness to a good many of their tricks, and, true enough, before the will was made, when they were persuading him and working him up to it, and had almost got him into the mind—for they kept telling him it was all for the good of the family, and that if Tom took possession, then all would be wasted and ruined—when they had got him to see things as they wanted him to see, they had him tried before the doctor one day. I suppose the doctor might want to know for his own satisfaction. However, for some reason or other, they got him to reckon up some bills, and to talk about some business that had to be settled, and he did manage that. I must own he managed that much to my surprise. And the doctor went away, to all appearance satisfied; and that very same day the will was made. But oh, poor dear! to see him afterward, and when there was only me beside him, how he did lament and go on about that boy, that he had struck off forever, as he said.”

“Was he there? Was Thomas in the way?”

“Oh no! They took care to get him off somewhere. They made an errand for him to Whinston, pretending to trust him with some very particular business—him that they said wasn’t fit to manage any thing; and when he came back his father was very bad—nigh upon death, for this shortened his days. And his speech was a good deal gone then, and he could do nothing but moan, and look so, when Master Tom came into the room. It went to my heart, that it did—and it’s there yet; and I don’t believe I can die happy unless I tell all that I know about this affair to some of ’em.”



“You have told me, nurse. You seem to recollect it very clearly. Suppose you write it all out on a paper, plainly and quietly, as it rises in your mind, some time when you are quite alone, and have nothing to agitate you; and pray God to help you, so that you may write the honest truth, and nothing but the truth.”

“Ay, that’s just what I have often wanted to do. You think it would be right, do you?”

“I feel quite sure it would be right, whatever may come of it. I am particularly anxious that there should be such a statement written out.”

“You! What for?”

“To have justice done, to be sure. For what other reason could I wish it?”

“Nay, I don’t know. You see, I’ve had a good deal to do with them that never aimed at justice at all—that aimed at nothing but serving their own ends; and you must excuse me if I’m not over-ready to trust these papers, and this getting people to write.”

“Well, nurse, I don’t believe, when you think the matter fairly over, that you’ll see much cause to suspect me. But I must leave you now; and I do hope you won’t delay about writing the paper, will you?”

“If you think I had better write it, I’ll try what I can do. But—I can’t tell how it is—somehow I get frightened when I’m by myself; for, you see, *they* were always getting papers written, and argued and persuaded people, to the hurt of them that should have been served better.”

“Come, nurse, you really must not be afraid of me. I don’t much wonder at what you feel. But just think, and then judge for yourself. Judge for yourself what my husband and I could possibly gain by having that will set aside, even if such a thing could be done. Not one penny, you see, could in any way come to us; but,



on the contrary, we should lose a present maintenance."

"True—true. I see how it is. Well, I'll try. Perhaps you would come and sit beside me?"

"No, you must be quite alone—alone, with only the eye of God upon you. If any one should at all help you—especially remember this—if Thomas should know of it, that would spoil all. It must be entirely your own doing; only when you come to sign it, I will tell you what to do, just as a form."

After repeating this charge Mary bade the nurse good-night, and went to the meeting. There was a relief which her nature seemed absolutely to crave, in joining the devotions of the little community who met there for praise and prayer; and when the simple service was over, she rose up, strengthened and encouraged, to pursue her way.

All through that day—indeed, all through the week—Mary had been hoping to meet again the companion who had joined her on that path, and who, in their short interview, had interested her so deeply; and she now looked onward and around, in the expectation of seeing him, but in vain. Unwilling to lose the slightest chance, she loitered by the stiles, and even sat down once or twice, but still he came not; and as the shades of evening deepened, Mary almost regretted that she had requested William would not meet her, because she knew that his presence would prevent his cousin from joining her. She had so much that she wanted to say to him, that the disappointment caused her severe pain, for her heart was very full. And must all this yearning solicitude be felt in vain? Mary would have thought it indeed in vain, could she have known how the object of it was just then occupied, or with what companions he was wasting those precious moments which he might have spent with her.



## CHAPTER VI.

THOSE who build their hopes upon a few kind words, or even a few kind actions, for effecting any serious reformation of character, will generally find themselves doomed to severe disappointment. These are but accessories in the work; yet, so far as they serve to open the door of confidence, not unfrequently prove most valuable; and always, under any condition of human experience, they bring their own abundant reward back to the heart from whence they emanate.

Mary had been a little too sanguine in the calculations she had made upon the result of an acquaintance begun, as she imagined, so auspiciously with her cousin, Thomas Ashton. She was, perhaps, a little too sanguine generally in what she undertook, ardently desiring that it should succeed. Still it was a failing not deeply to be deplored in her case, since it helped her to look cheerfully upon human life, and supported her under many an arduous duty which, without this tendency of character, must have been relinquished, or only languidly and hopelessly performed.

Under her present circumstances, especially, no one could have wondered had Mary yielded to despair. But no; she still hoped on, and still set herself to work, though in what way to work was indeed a difficult question just now; for every door seemed closed against her, and even her husband had little sympathy with some of her projects—that, for instance, which aimed at the restoration of his father's property in the farm to his own son, whom Mary persisted in considering as the rightful owner. William's sense of justice carried him no farther than the breaking of the compact between his fa-



ther and Peter. It was absurd, he said, to think of setting aside a will lawfully made. Besides, how unjust to himself that he should be turned adrift, as he must be in that case, after expending the prime of his life and strength, and the whole of his own resources, in redeeming the farm from its waste and neglected condition to one of remunerative value.

Mary listened quietly to these arguments, but it was with that kind of look and manner which convinced her husband that she remained "of the same opinion still;" and this had the effect of irritating him more than any direct opposition would have done.

Women often appear to men very obstinate, as well as very blind, in such matters; yet even men have sometimes, in the end, to acknowledge it was well they were so. This is when their moral sense has received so deep an impression as to the right and the wrong of some given case, that their reason refuses to take hold of the plea of expediency, interest, or even of the power of the law itself. It is marvelous, under such circumstances, to witness the little respect which they attach to all legal technicalities, as if the very language of the law was mere child's play to them—that oracular language over which deep heads have pondered and majestic wigs have nodded, and with which vast fields of parchment and huge volumes have been laden as with wisdom more precious than gold. And yet woman, weak woman, sometimes dares to lift up her voice against all this, believing that she has a stronger argument, and a deeper wisdom, in the clear language of simple right and wrong.

Thus it was that Mary remained most frequently very silent when her husband talked of the incontrovertible right which his father had, both to hold and to bequeath the property which had been a lawful bequest to him; while he assured her again and again that the only thing



wrong in the whole matter was the secret understanding between his father and his cousin, which had neither law nor equity for its support. It might not be exactly what people would *call* right, he said, for his uncle to leave the whole of his property to a brother instead of a son; but that was the testator's own affair, not theirs. There might be reasons for it, too, such as could not be explained to every body. Besides all which, it *was done*, and done lawfully; and there was an end of it, or ought to be, without any farther meddling.

This way which William adopted of hinting to his wife that she had much better keep herself quiet, than attempt to stir up family strife, was extremely painful to Mary. Her very soul revolted against the idea of entering a family as a meddling busy-body. Yet even this she bore quietly for the present, though all the while maintaining the same views with regard to the case altogether, and cherishing the same hopes that an overruling Providence would kindly make some way for bringing about a more equitable state of things, which, in her opinion, could not be merely what her husband would be satisfied with, but what her own conscientious feelings told her would be right. Often when William thought his wife must surely be convinced at last, and convinced forever, she was only keeping herself still as a matter of prudence, in order that she might not irritate him; or she was lifting up a silent prayer that God would establish the right, and overthrow the wrong, and that she herself might be so kept, by the power of His grace, as that she might not hinder, but rather help on the good work, let her own part in the matter be what it might with regard to individual suffering or loss.

While Mary pondered in this manner upon the affairs of the family, waiting for the door of hope to open upon reality, she was not altogether frustrated in some of her



endeavors, though tried with much need for patience in others. Mrs. Mason, the nurse, had faithfully carried out her wishes. The paper was written at great length, with the addition of details which had occurred to her recollection while writing; and this was placed in Mary's hands, who was glad to have it in her keeping, though far from being confident that it was likely to be useful. Her cousin, Thomas Ashton, she had seen again more than once, and a kind of intimacy had come to be established between them, which had, however, nothing but his own moral and spiritual interests for its foundation; for Mary was wise enough carefully to abstain from all appearance of taking part in the misunderstandings of the family, and still more from leaning either to one side or the other in their differences.

All that Mary endeavored to effect in connection with her unfortunate cousin was to bring him back into a condition of respectability, and, if possible, to inspire within him that feeling of self-respect, without which there can be little ground for hope. For the carrying out of this purpose she was especially fitted by a more than ordinary share of that fine womanly tact which can show respect without expressing it in words, and which, as it pervaded her conduct, her conversation, and even her very looks, tended to assure the poor outcast that she, at least, considered him worth saving; and, in doing this, she did not altogether fail in awakening within him a stronger desire to save himself.

"You have so much," she said to him in one of their evening walks, "to render life valuable to you."

"I!" said he with astonishment. "What can you mean?"

"Yes, you," replied Mary. "I often picture you in some far-off home—say in Canada, for example—beginning life afresh, without any body to point the finger of



shame at you—poor it may be, but with health for hard work, and an honest heart, a willing mind, and a vigorous body, to make the homeliest morsel sweet.”

“But how am I to *get* there?” he asked, almost impatiently.

“Ah!” replied Mary, “only be steady, perfectly steady, for a few months, and we’ll get you there, never fear, and somebody with you too; for I’m no friend to your going away alone. I declare, if I was a young man,” she added, “I wouldn’t wish for a pleasanter prospect than to start off with the woman I loved, all my own, and such a woman too, and to begin life where there was nobody to interfere with us. Do you ever think of this, Tom? I am sure I think of it for you. And I picture Bessy in a log hut—she’s just the girl for that sort of life—and you away in the woods. And I think of you both in this way until I almost hear the timber crackling under your heavy stroke, and then I see you coming home when the day closes in. Yes, *home!* Only think of that! And such a fine couple as you are, Tom! Why, work would be nothing to you. Of all the women I ever saw, Bessy seems the likeliest for such a life. And then she loves you so! Oh, cousin! do you count nothing of that? Is it all to be thrown away for the laughter of a few idle companions that I know you don’t care for in your heart, or for a draught of low pleasure that turns to poison when it’s swallowed? I tell you love is strong as death, and woman’s love especially; and I tell you still—I tell you always, there’s a future in store for you that any reasonable man might think himself rich to possess; and you’re not a man, Tom—you’re not worth calling a man, if you won’t strive, as you have never striven yet, to possess and enjoy it. Only—remember this—you must be worthy of it. Yes, that happiness never can be yours except on



one condition—you must repent, really repent. By repentance I don't mean, as some people seem to mean, just groveling down into the dust. Neither is shame repentance. By real repentance I mean taking God at his word, looking up, instead of down; and with an honest conviction believing all that he has told us to believe, simply because we have it in his blessed Word—believing that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners such as we are—not *in* our sins, but to get us clean out of them, so that we shall not sin again forevermore."

In this manner Mary talked often with her cousin, always with such kindness, and sympathy of tone and manner, that if he could not yet go along with her in her religious exhortations, it was impossible for him to resist the conviction, that words of such earnest and affectionate interest must have a deeper import than mere momentary compassion. By degrees they won upon him to his own astonishment. "But then"—there was always that vacillating *but then*—"what was he to do?" To go steadily on, Mary kept telling him—to show that he had really conquered his bad habits, and thus to inspire all who knew him with that confidence which can only be the result of perseverance.

Mary did not think it necessary to tell her husband all that took place in these interviews with her cousin, though she made no secret of their occasional walks together; and William, while he thought her an enthusiast, and calculated but little upon any lasting good as the result, was quite satisfied that his wife should persevere in her benevolent endeavors to save one who, in his opinion, would never make the necessary effort to save himself.

Mary wondered all the time what Bessy was thinking and feeling on the subject. That her cousin would make



her acquainted with what transpired, she could not doubt. Yet Bessy said nothing to her, though she fancied sometimes that she looked at her with a steady, searching gaze, which must have some meaning in it; and sometimes Bessy would now actually offer, of her own accord, to take charge of the children for a few hours, so that Mary might be set at liberty for other occupations.

"She is a strange creature," said Mary to herself; "but I'll just let her take her own course."

So there grew a little more appearance of good-will between them, without, however, an approach to any thing like intimacy.

On one occasion, when William was from home on business, and likely to be out for the night, Bessy came and stood beside Mary late in the evening, as if she either wished to bear her company in her solitude, or would like to enter into conversation with her. But the ice is difficult to break after the feelings of two persons in close communication have been long frozen over; and Mary, though wishing to be civil, scarcely knew what to say. At last she began by this simple observation—

"Father has gone over to Whinston to-day, hasn't he?"

"Yes," replied Bessy, "and I dare say he won't be back early. The days are very long now."

"Not too long for what I have got to do," said Mary. "These little folks of mine take a deal of sewing for."

"They must be an endless trouble," observed Bessy.

"Yes," said Mary, "but they are an endless joy. You don't like children, I think?"

"I don't like any thing very much."

"Oh! but I think you do."

"What is there that you think I do like, then, for I'm sure I don't know?"



"I think, to begin with, you like to stand in the old porch that opens into the garden, watching the flowers, and listening to the birds."

"I stand there when I'm most miserable of all, and hate every body, and wish I was away—away—some-where a thousand miles off."

"Would you like to go a long way off, Bessy?"

"I don't know what I should like. I don't think I should like any thing but to die. And I shall never die. Why, look here! Did you ever see such arms? and I never had an ailment in my life."

"You don't certainly look much like dying, Bessy; and I should think, in your place, it would be more natural, as well as pleasanter, to think about living."

"Pleasanter! What do you mean? What can there be pleasant to me? Oh, Mary! you are mocking me, and I didn't come here to be mocked."

"Indeed, I am not mocking you, Bessy. You are one of the last persons I should think of mocking."

"Why so?"

"Because I believe you are very unhappy."

"Oh, Mary—Mary—you don't know—you never can know how miserable I am!"

As Bessy said this she fell upon her knees at Mary's feet, and, burying her face in her lap, burst into such an agony of weeping that her tears seemed more like a flood of passion than the natural overflow of any common grief. Mary scarcely knew how to deal with such an outburst of uncontrolled emotion; only that nature has given to some women—and she was one—a sort of instinct which enables them to show feeling without speaking it. And thus it was that with her gentle, motherly hands she stroked that noble head, and softly replaced the heavy locks of disheveled hair, letting the poor sufferer weep on, until the tide of sorrow became exhausted by its own violence.



So by degrees the two women were able to converse more collectedly together, though Bessy still remained upon her knees, with her arms resting upon Mary's lap, at first talking strangely and wildly, more like a mad woman—as, indeed, she looked—than a rational creature. But Mary was no longer at a loss how to deal with her. Silence, coldness, and suspicion were the only things Mary could not meet with cordiality. They chilled her looks, and paralyzed her speech. But now the flood-gates were opened, the barriers removed. She could say any thing now; and long, and very intimate, and confiding was the intercourse that followed.

The fact was, that Bessy's naturally warm, but altogether undisciplined heart had, for some time, been almost bursting with gratitude to Mary for the part she had acted toward her cousin. Nothing in the whole range of human kindness could have affected the poor girl so deeply as this. It was so unlooked for, too; for, with the knowledge of Mary being a Methodist, she had associated the idea of spiritual pride, and all manner of uncharitableness toward persons less holy than herself. So that, in addition to the feeling of jealousy, and the sense of wrong with which Bessy had regarded the removal of William and his wife to Forest Farm, there was added the hatred of Mary's religious profession, which Bessy regarded as no better than hypocrisy, and the dread continually upon her mind of some sanctimonious preaching to herself, on the ground not only of her perverse attachment to a reprobate lover, but also on that of her own idle and worthless life.

Nothing could, therefore, exceed the astonishment of Bessy, when first told by her cousin of Mary's considerate and gentle kindness toward himself—of her endeavors to save him, too; for that, after all, was the point nearest Bessy's heart. She also, poor girl, in her strangely ig-



norant and untaught way, had tried that too—tried, and still failed, in consequence, she fancied, of knowing so little herself, and believing so little, that she found it impossible to suggest any ground of hope of sufficient weight to influence the conduct of a vacillating and despairing man. Lately, indeed, Bessy had given up altogether. She had lost all hope herself; and with all her strong feelings locked within her breast, and her capability of action and passion totally without exercise, she had been at times, as she now described herself, on the very verge of madness, though outwardly so quiet that, to the common minds by which she was surrounded, her conduct and appearance suggested nothing but sullenness, or, at best, an indolence which was not unfrequently made the subject of jocular remark.

In a rude and defiant manner Bessy had learned to throw back these taunts, or to meet them with a sullen and haughty look; and so little was known of her besides this, so seldom were the best elements of her character ever called forth, that few people loved, and none pitied her. Large, strongly-built women like Bessy, indeed, seldom are pitied; yet who shall tell what those vast capabilities of enjoying and suffering may be compelled to endure in the way of pain which never can be told?

While Mary listened to the outpouring of a heart so full of wild and strong emotion, yet so totally ungoverned, she grew almost frightened at the spectacle of so much force of character unrestrained by any consistently right principle, and scarcely, indeed, amenable to any law. It was almost like the seething of some great caldron, Mary thought, in which all passions and all feelings blended without assortment or distinction. And then to think that to a woman's form belonged all this!—that a woman's beauty, too, in the fresh glow of early



youth, was the fair mantle by which this smouldering fire had been so long concealed! Well indeed was it for Mary that the habit of her mind was one of such frequent prayer, that scarcely did a hope or a fear present itself—scarcely even a cheering or a gloomy thought, and still less any of those appalling mysteries of our being which have perplexed the deepest thinkers—but her burden—for there is a burden of joy as well as sorrow—was immediately brought to where old Pilgrim brought his; and there, also, she was able to leave it.

As the evening deepened into night, and still the master of the house had not returned, Bessy, whose thoughts had been to some extent forced into this channel, persuaded her mother to retire to rest, leaving only a manservant at the kitchen fire, and assuring her that she and Mary would keep watch, and see that her father was properly attended to. And these arrangements being satisfactorily made, she and Mary sat down again to pursue their conversation, though with less earnestness than before, the attention of both being divided between that, and any sound which might indicate the return of him for whom they now waited with an anxiety which every moment increased.

“I should not think so much about his being late,” said Bessy, “on such a fine night as this,” after she had been to the window to listen, and closed it again without hearing any thing but the distant barking of a dog, “if it was not for that habit of his that grows upon him, so that I declare I am quite frightened sometimes, thinking he will fall off his horse, and be found perhaps dead in a ditch.”

“What can he be doing,” said Mary, “so late as this?”

“Why, you see,” replied Bessy, “it’s Whinston fair, and there’s old Robinson, and a lot of them—they get together at the King’s Arms, and they don’t know how



time passes. I can't tell how it is, Mary—can you explain it?—how it is that drinking is so much more wicked in one person than another? Why, here's a set of those farmers—respectable men, people call them—they sit together drinking, week after week, until they don't know how they get home, whether it's on horseback or on foot, on their heads or their heels. And yet nobody seems to think a bit the worse of them; while yon poor fellow that has neither house nor home, nor wife, nor sister, to make him welcome, must be branded with shame, and called a vagabond, and never trusted with a farthing of his own! Mary, I can't understand—for the life of me I can't understand—what governs the world, nor how it is governed."

Mary was preparing to make the best reply she could, when both started up at the sound of a horse coming rapidly, but with uncertain pace, along the road. They both knew at once, by the manner in which it came, that the horse was without a rider; and they each looked aghast in the other's face, as if to find something there which might dispel their fears.

Mary was the first to rush out, and there she saw the horse with broken bridle, and saddle slightly displaced, making its way to the stable, though not in its usual manner, but tossing its head, and looking from side to side, as if conscious that something extraordinary had taken place. It was a clear moonlight night, and they saw all this as distinctly as if it had been day.

"We must go," said Mary, turning hastily back into the house—"you and I must go and see if we can find him."

Shuddering and breathless, Bessy seized Mary's arm. She could not speak, and seemed unable to move.

"Don't hold me," said Mary; "don't stand trembling there. We must both go, for you know you are very



strong. Call Ben, will you, but softly and gently? Don't wake mother if you can help it, and I'll tell the man to get the cart ready, and come after us."

Bessy did as she was bid, but, beyond the directions she received, was so perfectly helpless that Mary had to snatch up a bonnet for her, and wrap her in a shawl, and almost drag her out of the house. Nothing on her part was wanting, however. With perfect outward composure she had secured what she thought likely to be useful, such as plenty of linen in case of hurt, and such restoratives as came first to hand; while Bessy had stood by with her teeth chattering so loud as to be heard, and with that quivering of the limbs, and leaping of the fingers, which render them perfectly useless when any thing effective has to be done.

"Come, Bessy," said Mary, trying to rouse her, "you must not go on in that way. Think of helping—that's all we've got to do."

Bessy walked on as fast as she could in silence. At last she began in a sort of whisper, as one does when there is any thing like death to be feared.

"Suppose, Mary, we should find him dead!"

"I don't think we shall," replied Mary; "but we may find him very much hurt, and then you know we shall have to lift him into the cart; that is what I want you for so much. So do try, Bessy, and master yourself a little more, or you will be of no use whatever."

On they walked after this, silent again, until they reached the outskirts of the wood, through which there was a bridle-path, frequented by horsemen, as well as foot-passengers, because it was a little more direct than the road.

"Now, Bessy," said Mary, without a moment's hesitation, "you keep the road, and I'll go by the wood."

"You don't mean to go there alone," said Bessy.



"Yes, I do," replied Mary. "I don't mind the wood at all. The road is open and light for you, and we shall be within call."

"You can not be going into that wood by yourself," exclaimed Bessy; "all among the dark trees, and close by that black pond?"

"Never mind," said Mary. "What is there to fear, except that we should waste time, and so lose the chance of helping him?"

"But, Mary," said Bessy, still holding by her dress, "you don't know what it is to feel as I do. I've had such hard thoughts about him; and he's my own father after all."

"Well, Bessy, don't let that prevent you helping him. Now is the very time to do your duty to him in the best and kindest way, if you never did it before. It is right for me to do all I can for him; but it is doubly right for you. So go quickly, but quietly, on your way, and pray to God all the time—never mind how—pray earnestly, not in words only, but right down in the bottom of your heart, as you never prayed in all your life before."

Mary sprang across a shallow brook which separated the road from the entrance to the wood, almost before she had uttered these words, and was immediately lost sight of among the trees. Bessy could not refuse to follow the course which had been pointed out to her; but whether it was only in pursuing the public road, or whether it was also in those appeals for mercy and assistance which were so strange, both to her heart and to her lips, was never known except to herself.

The wood was very dark and lonely, with here and there mysterious gleams of moonlight shooting through the trees, making their shadows look more black and heavy, shaping out at intervals some giant form in their



huge white trunks, or some fiendish monster in their twisted boughs. But Mary had no thoughts to spare for such imaginary terrors. There was one great dread upon her soul which swallowed up all others—it was lest death should have actually stilled that unrepentant heart, and sealed those unholy lips forever. Much as she had tried to conceal her own dismay from her companion, there were thoughts confined to her own breast almost too weighty and momentous to be borne. But they were of a nature to make her so indifferent to the less important things around her, that she could ever afterward understand, from her own experience on that occasion, how delicate women can go by night to search for their wounded or their slain upon the battle-field without fear. One thought, and one alone, with its unavoidable accompaniments, so filled her mind that she was in danger of overlooking what she was still most anxious to discover.

At length, on coming to a more open space in the wood, Mary was able to see by the moonlight some recent footprints of a horse not having gone straightforward in its way, but rather trampling about, as if uncertain what to do. Her heart beat violently as she looked about her here; but nothing more was to be seen, and she entered again upon the narrow path, which became so thickly overshadowed, that she had to examine very carefully on both sides, lest any thing should escape her observation. While looking about in this manner, Mary stumbled over something. It was only a broken bough, but near it was a hat. Now she felt that the crisis was at hand. She called, but no answer came. She listened in the hope of catching some sound, but in vain. “It must be very near.” How soon we begin to speak of *it*! Yes, truly—that was the white shirt, torn at the bosom by the bough which had been broken off; and



Mary had nearly passed it unconsciously, for the old man had fallen on one side of the path, and lay so completely in the shadow, that only the most careful searcher could have recognized a human form in that uncertain light.

Mary's first thought was to call to Bessy, who could not be far distant, because, at this part of the way, the road and the path ran almost parallel; but her second and stronger impulse was to ascertain whether life was really extinct; and for this purpose she stooped down, and listened, and felt, until hope revived; for there was evident proof that, though stunned and insensible, that helpless form was still living.

Springing to her feet, Mary now called loudly for Bessy to come to her, adding some words of comfort and assurance; and presently she heard a crackling among the bushes, which convinced her that Bessy had heard, and was at hand.

Both now applied themselves to ascertain, if possible, what was the nature of the injury sustained; but the condition of the old man previous to his fall rendered all such examination fruitless; and they next endeavored to devise the best means of getting him conveyed to the cart, which they heard already on the road, though at a considerable distance.

Bessy was all energy and help now. She had a definite purpose now in what she did; and, when that was the case, she was the very person to work, and to work as few women could. Recollecting that the wood was entered by a small gate through which no carriage could pass, Bessy proposed to carry her father to that spot, declaring she could do so without the least assistance. Mary would not allow her to do this; but between them they so managed their melancholy task that by the time the cart arrived they were ready with their heavy



burden, which, with the assistance of Benjamin and the man-servant, was placed upon the straw, and safely conveyed to the house.

Here there was much to be done by the women, especially in the absence of William Ashton; and the whole remainder of that night was passed with scarcely any interchange of individual feeling, so intent was every one upon the solemn and important duties which had to be performed.

## CHAPTER VII.

WHEN William Ashton reached home the following day he received the intelligence of his father's accident in a manner which indicated that he was, if possible, more appalled than distressed. He had neither the natural energy nor the tendency to hope which characterized his wife, but was liable, under any great calamity, to sit down in despondency, concluding that, as all things were against him, it could be of no use struggling to oppose his fate.

On the present occasion this tendency of William's seemed to overpower every effort, as well as every hope. Naturally kind and feeling toward those with whom he was closely associated, whether by habit or by relationship, he became distressed beyond measure at the spectacle of his father's sufferings, which were, indeed, such as might have awakened sympathy in a more indifferent beholder.

It had been supposed, at first, that the senses of the old man were only stunned, not materially injured; and, so far as the brain was concerned, this proved to be the case. But on further examination it was discovered that, in addition to other injuries received by the fall, there was the complicated fracture of a limb in a part



which rendered the consequences to be apprehended extremely serious. With the return of sensibility, the sufferings occasioned by this fracture were extreme, as well as from the difficult setting, which had to be delayed until additional surgical help could be obtained. During the most painful scenes William was unable to remain in the room with his father; and Mary alone took the entire duty of attending upon the surgeons, and receiving their instructions how to manage the patient when they were gone.

There are persons who, even when they do not inspire affection, command confidence. Mary was eminently one of these; and now her name was to be heard all over the house, coupled with such expressions as "ask Mary," or "tell Mary," or more frequently still, "Mary will do it." And so she did a thousand painful duties which others shrank from; for the patient was not the most amiable, and it was sometimes frightful to be in the room with him, and to hear his strange, rambling, unhappy talk, knowing, as every one did, that he was a man who had no religious consolation whatever—who had nothing to make life endurable, when deprived of the few groveling enjoyments in which he had lately appeared to be endeavoring to drown all serious thought.

Women, as a general rule, sustain any continued trial to their feelings better than men; and William Ashton declared it was impossible for him to endure being in the room with his father. He was no doubt troubled, as his sister had been, with the remembrance of hard thoughts which he had cherished against him, and which now rose up in strange and painful contrast with the pity which his present circumstances called forth. Bessy was equally at a loss what to do, though she often asked Mary to tell her of some service which she might perform; but, failing in these attempts, she betook her-



self to that which was, perhaps, the kindest service she could render—taking the children almost entirely under her care.

Poor Mrs. Ashton could scarcely claim any part in the duties now to be discharged. She had so long acted upon the principle of not meddling, that she had almost ceased to have any use in the world; and the fear of her husband, which had grown upon her since his habits and character had altered so much for the worse, rendered the bare idea of being left alone with him now, in his pain and his misery, insupportable. She therefore only walked in and out of the room at intervals, concealing herself generally behind the curtains of the bed, where she often heard, to her dismay, those angry tones from which she always shrank with terror, and not the less so now that there was a certain indescribable kind of awe attaching to her husband's condition.

What would the world do without such women as Mary Ashton? What, indeed, would the family at Forest Farm have done without her? Nor was it only her clever hand and willing mind that rendered her so useful. She was so perfectly self-governed, and outwardly so calm, that nothing seemed to be overlooked or forgotten by her. All over the house her quick perceptions appeared to extend, and her spirit to pervade every department. Those who beheld her thus, active and considerate, taking note of the minutest details, and even looking in advance upon what might be, as well as making sure of what was, could have formed little idea of the true state of her mind as to its inner feelings, and least of all would have supposed that one deep-seated and paramount desire was continually present with her, throwing into comparative insignificance all other matters in which she was concerned. Yet so it was; and while William yielded entirely to the desponding con-



viction that things must take their course, Mary only prayed and hoped the more that some way might be opened for bringing about the one object upon which her heart was set with such concentrated earnestness of desire.

It could be of no use vexing William now with any difference of opinion upon the right and the wrong of matters which hung upon a very doubtful life. It was of no use now teasing him with arguments which she had already tried so often in vain. More than ever Mary saw that her heart was to be quiet, and to wait. The doctors assured her that at present all was going on well with their patient. She had no reason to suppose that death must necessarily be the result of this accident; rather, perhaps, a lingering illness, and long confinement, during which some happy change might take place; and, at all events, she was absolutely compelled to wait, for the way or the means of bringing about what she most desired was at present completely hid from her view.

The line of demarkation which separates doing good from officious meddling is so fine, that there is no wonder timid and cautious spirits shrink from attempting such a path. It needs, in fact, more real heroism in many cases to venture to do good than to storm a citadel or to command a hostile fleet. It needs this heroism, because the venture to the individual is so great. If the warrior falls, he falls with glory; but if, in attempting to do good, we only incur the odium of officious meddling, nothing can save us from the obloquy which friends no less than enemies are always prepared to heap upon us.

Mary Ashton would have felt this venture in all its force, had she not been one of those who habitually rely upon help beyond themselves in whatever they undertake of any serious importance; and had she not also



been supported by that belief, under which so many great as well as good actions have been performed, that it was laid upon her as an especial and personal duty to do something to bring about that act of justice from which her purpose was never diverted, and in view of which her spirit never quailed.

If throughout the household Mary was a person of the utmost importance, she was especially so to the patient on his bed of pain. He was often angry with her—blamed her for much that vexed and annoyed him—spoke to her at times in language that was any thing but respectful or kind; but still he must have her near him. He would have no other hand than Mary's to dress his wounds or even to touch him; and no change must be made, nor any thing of importance done, except by Mary's order, and under her immediate inspection.

Mary began very naturally to wonder how long this would last, or rather how long her strength would hold out—for her attendance was required for the night as well as the day—when one morning a visitor was announced whose presence seemed not unlikely to change the whole aspect of affairs in the sick-room.

This visitor was Peter Ashton, who came as soon as he had heard of the accident, and who no sooner entered the house than, with tones of compassion almost amounting to tenderness, he began to bemoan the condition of the family, and that of his uncle in particular.

For the first time since the accident, Mary obtained, on this occasion, some hours of unbroken rest. She had previously sent for the nurse, Mrs. Mason, whose services she hoped might, in time, be rendered acceptable to the patient; and as Peter had expressed a desire to be alone with his uncle, she gladly relinquished her post of duty, which could have been nothing but painful and humiliating to her while he was there—such was the re-



pugnance, such almost the loathing with which his character and his manners affected her. William, too, was indignant at the liberty, as he considered it, which his cousin was taking; and in this spirit he walked into the room two or three times himself, intending to indicate that he was the person who had the greatest right to be there. His report on these occasions was to the effect that Peter was teasing the old man with papers and parchments, and that he had a pen and ink beside him, which he did not doubt but he had been making some bad use of. Indeed, he saw, by the flush on his father's face, that he had been too much excited in some way or other; and it was his firm belief that, if Peter was not got away, he would be the death of him.

Mary was quite of the same opinion, and she was glad when a visit from the doctor put an end to this prolonged interview, from which Peter came down smiling, and asking for his cousin Mary.

Mary went with him alone into a private room, for she also had something to say to him. At first she had considered it best to wait for him to begin; but whatever he might have to say was introduced with so much circumlocution that Mary, who was pressed for time, lost patience, and plunged at once *in medias res*.

"I have wanted very much to see you," she said, "because I think Mr. Ashton has been in the habit of confiding in you more than any one else respecting his pecuniary affairs."

"Yes," said Peter, "he did me the honor of confiding in me respecting the drawing up of his will, of which I hold in my hand a copy at this moment."

"And I hold in my hand a copy," said Mary, "of how that will was made."

"Indeed!" said Peter, not in the least disconcerted, but as if rather pleasantly interested, and a little curious.



Mary opened the paper which contained Mrs. Mason's statement, and began to read it aloud. As she did so Peter leaned back in his chair, folded his arms, and regarded her with an amused kind of smile, which now and then swelled into a little chuckling laugh, accompanied by such expressions as "Dear me! How exceedingly curious! Really I should scarcely have thought that woman could have expressed herself so well!" All which Mary bore with what steadiness of voice and temper she could command, continuing to read straight forward to the end, and then looking the man full in the face.

"Well, cousin?" said Peter, when she had finished.

"Well, Peter Ashton?" said Mary.

The lawyer laughed.

"It is really too absurd!" he exclaimed. "You must forgive me, cousin; but upon my word it is impossible to be grave. You surely do not attach any importance to that document?"

"I attach importance to it," replied Mary, "because I believe it to be true. What I want to know is, whether, in the face of such truth, you will continue to maintain the unjust and iniquitous position which you have assumed?"

"Just allow me to glance over that paper again, will you?" said Peter, extending his hand.

"Willingly," said Mary, giving it to him. "This is only a copy. You can take it with you. I have the original in my own possession."

In spite of himself, Peter looked vexed. He found it was no play dealing with such a woman as Mary. So he spoke in a more business-like manner, though at the same time with less civility than before.

"Come, come," said he, "this is downright nonsense altogether. We had better be serious, and look at this case in its true light. I tell you, cousin, that paper is of



no more use, and would serve you no more in a court of justice, than this strip which I hold in my hand after I had torn it into a thousand shreds."

"That may be," said Mary, "as things are at present. But suppose Mr. Ashton should live a few years, or even months longer, and make another will?"

Peter's brow fell, but he instantly recovered himself.

"He can't do that," said he. "He can never do that."

"Why not?" asked Mary.

"Because," he answered, "I have his promise under a solemn oath."

"Yes," said Mary, "you have his promise both to bequeath this property to you at his death, and to pay you so much a year so long as he holds it. But what can that promise do for you, except to frighten him into keeping it? I therefore tell you that you can not show that promise in any court of law. You dare not show it among honorable men. You would not, for your own credit's sake, be known to have acted so base a part as to have wrung such a promise from any one."

"That remains to be seen," said Peter. "However, leaving that out of the question, do you not see that it would be equally base in you to frighten the man, now on his death-bed, into leaving the farm to your husband?"

"Leave that to me," said Mary.

"I don't know that I shall leave it," exclaimed Peter, now thoroughly irritated. "I don't know that I shall not come and remain here myself, to see that justice is done."

"I don't think you will," said Mary, "so long as there are those in the house who have a right to prevent you."

Peter had now lost all command over his temper; and if any thing had been wanting on his part to convince



Mary what his real character was, the conclusion of this interview would have been sufficient. Having said all that she wished, Mary left him to his fury, and soon had the satisfaction of hearing his steps retreating from the house. After he had mounted his horse, however, he spoke with his accustomed calmness to the doctor, who was just then leaving; and Mary heard from an open window that the doctor thought his patient not quite so well. A little more feverish, restless, and altogether less comfortable. "However," he added, "quiet may do a great deal for him, and after to-night we shall see."

Mary could not help thinking that Peter looked extremely well satisfied with this information. The impression of that day he knew to have been favorable to his own purposes; but he could not feel sure of what might be done to efface it, should the old man's life be prolonged, as Mary had suggested, through after years, especially with a woman like her always near him. What could he have been about, he asked himself as he rode home, to let the old man bring those people to the farm? To be sure he was muddling every thing away—ruining the place entirely; and William was likely to manage it well for his own interests. But that woman! If he had entertained the least idea of the sort of woman Mary was, he would have turned farmer himself rather than have suffered her to come meddling there.

Mary had profited so much by the rest obtained during Peter's visit, that she was ready with renewed strength to take her watch for the following night; and she seated herself by a small table in the sick-room with peculiar satisfaction, derived from the idea that every one else in the house would enjoy the comfort of unbroken repose until the dawning of another day.

The whole family had retired to their separate apartments earlier than usual; and while a general stillness



reigned around, Mary took out her little pocket Bible, and began to read to herself. She had not been long engaged in this manner when the patient suddenly started from an uneasy sleep, and, dashing back the curtain of the bed, called out, "Who's there?"

"I am here," said Mary, going up to the head of the bed.

"That's right," said the patient; "but where is he?"

"Who?" asked Mary.

"Why, Peter, to be sure."

"Oh! he went away a long time ago."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, quite sure. I saw him mount his horse and ride out of the yard."

"Thank God!" exclaimed the old man, as his head sank back on the pillow. "He'll be the death of me, Mary, if you let him come here again."

"I don't think he is likely to come again," said Mary. "But why should you let him disturb you so?"

"Let him!" exclaimed the old man again. "I should like to know how I am to help myself, seeing all that has passed."

"I think you could help yourself, though," observed Mary.

"No, no," said the old man, despondingly; "there's no help for me, either in this world or the next."

"But you don't think so well of Peter, do you, father, that you wish to be connected with him?"

"Think well of him! Who does think well of him, I wonder? I've wished his horse would fall with him a hundred times, and break that stubborn neck of his."

"Hush! That's not the way to get out of the difficulty. You can only make bad worse by wishing such wishes as that."

"I'll tell you what, Mary—come closer—don't let



any body hear — things are so bad, they can't be made worse."

"Oh, father! and we don't know but this hurt of your leg may take a bad turn, and you are an old man; and whether it does or not, you can not be very much longer for this world."

"Ay, that's the way you Methodists are always talking. I hate such cant. Let's have a bit of common sense."

"Well, then, I think the common sense of the case is this—that you, a man, your own master, at liberty to think and act for yourself, have got into the clutches of another man not half your age, who turns and twists you about just as he likes; and that you want to get out of this bondage, and may get out if you like."

"No, I can't, Mary."

"Why not?"

"Because he has my promise signed and sealed—my solemn oath."

"It is sometimes more wicked to keep a promise than to break it."

"Is that your religion, Mary? I always believed your Methodists were a pack of hypocrites; but I had thought better things of *you*."

"Look here, father; this is what I mean. It is a very bad thing to break a promise; but if the promise is a bad one, likely to injure any body, we have in that case only a choice of two evils, and are plunged into evil so deeply, that we can not, if we would, get clear out. So in that case we ought, I think, to choose the least evil of the two, and especially that which hurts only ourselves."

"Ah! that's all fine talking; but I don't understand a bit of it. I only know that fellow Peter holds a promise of mine, written out in my own handwriting, and signed



with my own name; and I know he'll keep me to what I've promised, too."

"But just think a little bit, father, and I'll try to put the matter in a clearer light. Suppose a man got into bad company—got linked in with thieves and murderers, and they wanted to kill and rob somebody, and persuaded him into promising that, on a certain night, he would waylay this person and murder him. Well, before that time, he begins to see the wickedness of the act, and the wickedness of the people who have stirred him up to do it. Do you think he is still bound to commit the murder because he has promised to do so?"

"No, certainly. But then you have put such a strong case. Murder, you know, is such a horrid, brutal thing."

"We were speaking of the *wrong*; and, though it may be more brutal, I don't see how it is more wrong to take away a person's life than to take away his means of living, when you have no right to touch either. Wrong is wrong, you know, all through the world, for this life and the next, for time and for eternity; and it's a dreadful thing to die, with a wrong act persisted in, upon your conscience."

"You talk so strangely. I don't like to be talked to in that way, Mary. And besides, I'm so ill—so very, very ill."

"I know you are, father; and it is partly on that account that I feel so strongly. I can not shut my eyes to the possibility—nay, the probability—that you may never rise up from that bed again. You may die there, you know; and if that wound should take a bad turn, you may die very soon."

The old man could only groan, and toss his head uneasily from side to side. Mary went on—

"I don't like to make you uncomfortable, because I know you have so much to suffer. But indeed, if you



will believe me, I only want to make your sufferings less in the world to come—that world we must all enter upon, whether we desire to do so or not. Time is short here, you know. Whatever we suffer here will soon be over. But to go away into the darkness forever—never to see the light of God's countenance, nor to hear any thing but the hateful words of the wicked, forever and forever! Oh, father! you must think of these things, indeed you must; for you are an old man, and will be soon called away, whether you recover from this accident or not."

"But the doctors didn't tell me I should die, Mary."

"No, nor I don't say so much as that. You may not die now. I see no reason why you should. I hope you will live to lead a better and a happier life. I don't think you have been very happy of late. Have you, father?"

"You know I haven't, Mary. What's the use of asking me that? No, nor I never shall be—not as you mean by happiness."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm too far gone in the filthy mire—I've got entangled in it, head, heart, and hand. I'm bound up to it, as it were."

"And yet you hate it."

"I hate it so that it makes me hate every thing else, and every body."

"Yet I think you once had a kind heart, father—I think you once loved your children—nay, I think you once loved God."

"I did once, Mary. I remember a time—"

The old man could say no more. His voice broke down, and he turned his face to the wall.

"Don't put away the remembrance of that time," said Mary. "Let us go back to it. When was it? I am



sure it was a happier time than you have known since. I am sure the sun was brighter to you then—the fields were greener—the face of man more welcome—your home more smiling, and your own heart more at peace with all the world. Wouldn't you like to get those feelings back again, father?"

"They never can be got back again, Mary—never—never."

"Yes, but they can, and better still—just so much better as you are nearer the journey's end, and so less likely to be troubled with temptations to go back—so near, indeed, that you may look right up into the streets of the celestial city, where angels will come to meet you, and conduct you into the presence of the Lord, to sit down at his right hand, and to go no more out forever. I am not dreaming—indeed I am not. It is all true—true as this blessed Book. We none of us shall get to heaven for never having sinned, but by repenting of our sins; and that is what the best among us has to do before he can be saved?"

"And if I should repent, what then?"

"The next thing to leaving off doing wrong is to begin to do right. You know the story of one Saul of Tarsus—how he was struck down—arrested all at once in as bold a course as ever man could take in the wrong direction—and as strong a man, too; and how he rose up *like* a man, and said, 'Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?' *He* didn't stop to talk about the men he was linked in with. *He* didn't say, 'I have promised such a one;' or, 'Such another expects me to do so and so;' and yet, no doubt, it was so with him. But he felt there was a hand, stronger than any man's, laid upon him; and that hand he must be guided by, come what would."

"But he was a *strong* man, Mary; and I am weak—so very weak."



"Yes, father, but he had been strong in doing wrong, and that made it so much more difficult for him to begin to do right. You have been weak both in evil and in good; but, so far as human help can go, I will stand by you, father—we will all stand by you."

"I'm not so sure of that. We are altogether a godless family—no love among us—nothing to help one another with."

"It may have been so, but better times are coming—I firmly believe they are, father. Let us all unite together, heart and hand, and better times will be sure to come. Oh! I should like to see you all as happy as I know you might be even yet."

"No, Mary; we can never be a happy family, because I, who am at the head of it, have done a great wrong. There's not one of them I can look in the face, and say I have not wronged. Take William first—I can not leave him this property; and yet I know he came here expecting it to be his. And there's Bess—poor Bess—she hates the sight of me, because of her cousin Tom; and she knows I've got his rightful inheritance from him. No, Mary; we can never be a happy family. You need not talk to me in that way."

"I should not talk to you as I do, father, but that I am convinced this wrong—for it is a dreadful, wicked wrong—may all be set right."

"I wonder how."

"Make another will."

The old man started so violently, that the pain it caused his wound made him cry out. But he seemed to forget that as he fixed his eyes upon Mary's face searchingly, and asked her again what she could mean.

"I mean," she answered, "that so long as you have life, and the possession of your reason, you can make a just will, which the present one has never been."



"Another will!" he repeated, as if unable to comprehend the idea.

"Yes," Mary said. "You know people often alter their wills. There are cases in which they have to be altered quite at the last. Only it is always better to do so while the head is clear, and there can be no suspicion of incompetency. We never know what may happen in a single day, and especially in illness."

"But," said the old man, with the greatest perplexity still written on his countenance, "*he* has a copy."

"That is nothing," replied Mary. "That copy bears one date, but your right will will bear a later; and the circumstances under which that will was made are so suspicious that I am sure, if made public, they would go far to render it void."

"Yes; but who knows that?"

"I know it."

"You!"

"The nurse, Mrs. Mason, told me all about it."

"Ay, she was about here at the time, I remember."

"She has even written out a clear and exact account of every thing; and *that* we should be able to show, if the later will should be disputed after your death."

"You bewilder me, Mary. I can not tell what all this means."

"It means that you have been in bad hands, and that the way is opening for you to get out."

"And suppose I should get out, what sort of a will could I make to set things on a better footing?"

"What ought to have been made by your brother—what in the course of nature, and even of law, would have taken place if Peter had never interfered."

"Why, in that case, I suppose this property would have gone to his brother Tom. You can never wish that, surely?"



"Yes, I do."

"How so?"

"Because it is simply right."

"Right! Is it right that a reprobate like him should have it put into his power to be more riotous and wasteful than he is now?"

"That is his affair, not ours. If his father had been left entirely to himself in this affair—if Peter had had no hand in it—if, besides this, the poor man had been quite himself, I would never have lifted a finger in the matter, scarcely have felt a wish about it. It would have been right then for him to do what he liked with his own. But you know what went before—you know all about Peter and his schemes—you know the wicked compact you entered into with him—and you must know that the only way to prevent further wickedness, and misery that none of us can see the end of, is for you to go straight back again to the beginning of this affair, and make all right again, as you have the power to do now, but may not have it long."

"I declare, Mary, I can not understand you. You are different from any woman I ever saw in my life before. Why, look here—all the while that you are arguing with me in this way, you are going clear against your own husband, your children, and yourself. If you had wanted me to leave the property to William, I should have known what it all meant. But don't you see that William would be turned adrift, without any thing, if that vagabond had all?"

"And where, I would ask, will he be if Peter has all? But it is not that at all. I desire to leave that entirely in the hands of God, and just to get the right thing done while there is the power to do it."

"Have you told William what you are driving at?"

"Yes, I have told him what I wished, and why I wished it."



“And what does he say?”

“Not much. I can not say that he sees exactly with me in some things. But he will do in time, I believe; and no one can feel more strongly than he does about the wickedness of this compact with Peter. And now, father, since you see that William would not be a bit the worse off if the property was left to the oldest son, than if left to the youngest, that need not for a moment stand in the way.”

“You have taken me so by surprise, Mary, that I don’t know what to think, nor what to do.”

“You are tired now, father. Suppose you try to get a little sleep. I am afraid you are very much tired.”

“I am tired, child; but I can not sleep for all that. Oh, Mary—Mary! When I was a little child there was a good, patient woman—only a poor woman—she that nursed us all—she used to come and pray with me every night before I went to sleep. It is such a long, long while ago! Am I the same person, do you think? Is it possible I can be the same as that little boy that used to say his prayers, and sleep so soundly?”

“I think you may be like a little child again,” said Mary, taking the old man’s feverish hand in hers. “I think that is the best thing you can do—just try to be a little child, and to feel that the same God is watching over you still—the same blessed Jesus holding out his arms to you, as he did to the little children when he took them to his bosom.”

“Yes, but he said, ‘Of such is the kingdom of heaven.’”

“He said also, ‘Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’”

I



## CHAPTER VIII.

ALTHOUGH progress had now been made in some directions beyond Mary's most sanguine expectations, she could not help feeling that, in others, she was far indeed from having arrived at the fulfillment of her wishes. So much, in fact, depended upon the right feeling of others, where there was little ground for believing that right feeling existed at all, that nothing but a peculiar character of mind, allied to a peculiar faith, could have afforded, under such circumstances, any amount of cheerful confidence. In herself she was painfully conscious that what her hopes were aiming at, and her efforts struggling to attain, would appear, to any one but herself, so entirely like the mere vision of an excited fancy, that she dared not even make a confidant of her husband at present, but worked on without either support or sympathy from any human being.

After the night already described, the old man made no allusion for some time to the subject which Mary had so earnestly forced upon his attention. She began to fear he had forgotten it—that his mind had become confused, so that the impression which she had been so anxious to make was lost; or he might be regarding it altogether as a dream, too vague and groundless to be worth recurring to again. This was truly a discouraging conclusion; but Mary could be quiet under discouragement, and she thought it best not to be too urgent.

While the affairs of the sick-room remained in this doubtful state, Mary tried what could be done in another quarter, and, by the assistance of the nurse, obtained an interview with her cousin, Thomas Ashton, which above all things was necessary to the progress of her plans.



They met in Mrs. Mason's cottage, where there could be no fear of interruption; and Mary was now obliged to throw herself entirely upon the honorable feeling of a man, respecting whom there were scarcely more than two individuals in the world who entertained any idea of his being worthy of trust.

One of these was the nurse, and she, perhaps, knew Thomas Ashton better than any one else, because she knew the good as well as the evil of his character; and she always maintained firmly, that had he been more fairly dealt with, he would have been a wiser and a better man.

But he *was* better, she told Mary. There was already a great difference in his conduct. He had obtained employment, and kept to it well. He had put money into her hands to keep for him; and as to bad company and intemperance, she did not believe there was any thing of that kind which he had need to be ashamed of now.

This was all hopeful and cheering; but could Mary really trust him? The common selfishness of a depraved nature might turn her project to the worst purposes—even imprudence might hurry on results, and so frustrate all the good desired. And yet she *must* ascertain his real state of heart and mind in the matter, or it would be impossible to proceed.

If Mary had felt inclined to trust her cousin before they met, she was still more so after looking steadily in his face, so much was his countenance, and indeed his whole appearance, altered for the better.

Yes; she was determined to trust him. Mary felt that at this crisis there could be no half acting. She must give herself entirely to what she had to do, or not act at all. So she said at once,—

“I have come for the purpose of having a long talk with you, cousin—a talk about business first, for it is



necessary that I should be acquainted with your opinion and feeling on two or three points. Suppose all things were put upon a right footing again, should you like to live at Forest Farm?"

"No, not at all. I should have liked it once. It used to be the only wish of my heart. There is no spot on earth I could ever love as I loved that old place, where the memory of my mother seems to live in every nook and corner. But I could not live there now—if I might, I would not—nothing could induce me to do so."

"Why not?"

"Ah, Mary! you know. You know how my character stands in the eyes of every body about here."

"But your character may improve, and, with God's blessing, I believe it will."

"I also believe it will—at least, I hope so; but that must be somewhere else, a long way from here, among people who never heard of me except as an honorable and upright man."

"And why not here, if you had a good wife to support you?"

"No; that would make the matter worse to me. I should think every one was pointing at her as the woman who degraded herself by marrying a drunkard. No, Mary, no woman shall marry to shame in marrying me; and if I am ever to become a respectable and a happy man, I must go away—quite out of the country, as you once proposed to me—perhaps to Canada. And if I can only keep as I am now—quite steady for a whole year—do you think William would help me with the means of getting away? The old man will most likely be gone by that time, and then Bessy herself may come in for a share. What do you think, Mary?"

"I think—indeed, I feel quite sure—that William would help you if he could; but there is a point besides



this that I want settling, for the satisfaction of my own mind. Suppose, Thomas, that you were actually the owner of Forest Farm—suppose the old man should bequeath it back to you, and it should thus become entirely your own, would you in that case prefer going away?”

“Decidedly—for some years at least. Character, you know, does not grow in a day—scarcely in a year. I suppose I was always weak; people have always told me so; and I declare to you now, Mary, that I would not live upon that farm, among the people who have known me such a worthless vagabond, not for a thousand a year. Besides which—you must not be too hard upon me if I confess it—but really, Mary, I should not quite like to trust myself with money of my own, and a good house to be hospitable in, and plenty to do with, among the sort of fellows who would come about me then, and whom I know I should not have the courage to shake off.”

“I don’t know but you are right, Thomas. I think I should feel the same as you do, if I were in your place. But now I have another question to ask you. If the farm should be left to you, would you like William to manage it for you, paying you a yearly rent?”

“Better than any one else a great deal. But what in the world are you driving at? I can not understand you. It’s no more likely that farm should be left to me, than that the sun or the moon should be. Mrs. Mason tells me it is intended for Peter; but I always supposed, as a matter of course, that William would have it. Has my uncle been saying any thing about it, then?”

“I have had a good deal of talk with him on the subject. I don’t know yet how it will be, only I know it won’t be my fault if all that wicked business about the will is not set right at last.”



"You astonish me, Mary, more and more. Do you mean to say that *you* are laboring with my uncle to get him to make another will, and to leave that property to me?"

"I do."

"To me!"

"Yes, to you, because you are the oldest son, and because your father was wrongly dealt with when he was persuaded to leave the property to his brother."

"You mean William—your husband. You can not mean me!"

"I mean you, and no one else."

"What me!—the outcast—the reprobate—a man that nobody believes in—a wretch that has scarcely a roof under which to shelter his head, and, more than that, does not deserve to have one? And would you, a wise and prudent woman, run such a risk as to put this temptation in his way?"

"My simple aim is to do justice, or to get it done. With the temptation I have nothing to do. That is between God and your own soul. But somehow I don't think—I *can not* think that, if this should all be brought about as I desire, you would quite forget the duty you would owe in return to the kind Providence without whose help we can do nothing. You would not turn quite away from God, would you, Thomas, with this great, this unexpected proof of his mercy every day before your eyes? Even for my sake, besides, I think you would hardly like that people should say how you had deceived and disappointed me."

"Is it true, Mary Ashton? Am I dreaming? Let me hold your hand, and look into your eyes. Is it true that you—a good woman, a religious woman, an honest-hearted and pure-minded woman—should be working in this way to get the right done to me, when you know



all the time that, unless I repent and become a different man, right will all be turned to wrong? Is it possible that you can so far trust me as to do this?"

"It *is* true, Thomas. And now, dear cousin, let us enter into a little compact together this night that we will be true to one another."

Thomas Ashton stood up reverently, and with clasped hands he uttered a solemn vow, which was more than half a prayer, that, so far as God would give him strength to resist, he would neither touch nor taste that which had been his greatest bane, until Mary herself should absolve him from this promise. He would have said more, but heart and voice both failed him, and, sinking down upon his chair, he bowed his head upon his hands, and burst into tears.

Mary rose and stood beside him. With sisterly tenderness she placed one arm round his neck, and drawing him near her, leaned her head upon his, while she wept too. They were not tears of unhappiness, still less tears of despair, which dimmed her eyes. No, they were blessed tears; for in that close but silent communion there was the offering up of a contrite heart, with all its many imperfections and its heavy sins, where true penitence never yet was offered up in vain.

After a long silence Mary said softly, "I must go now, Thomas. We understand each other now, I think. But I must have a plain, business-like account to give to William, or he will not listen to me. I may tell him, then—may I?—that you seriously—no, solemnly, declare you would prefer not living at Forest Farm, even if it were yours?"

"You may."

"And that you would wish him to occupy it?"

"Decidedly."

"And you would not be unreasonable, Thomas, in



what you would expect of him as a tenant? You would remember the bad state in which he found the farm?"

"Say what you like, Mary. Make your own terms. I don't want any thing of William, if only he would help me off to Canada, and the sooner the better."

"Ah! but that is not business-like, Thomas. It might do for you and me, but it won't do for William. I want a straightforward, rational proposal to make to him. What do you think of a hundred a year for five or seven years? Would that be sufficient?"

"I should feel myself rich with that, in addition to what I could make by the labor of my own hands."

"You see, Thomas, I want to make good terms for my husband, after all. I don't want, any more than he does, to have any thing done in the way of romantic generosity. I like those bargains that are as good on one side as on the other, and so are good for both. Besides which, you may be sure I would not do any thing to injure my husband's interests, or to interfere with his rights, for any consideration in the world. It is because I am so anxious on his account, and anxious also to prove to him that I would not injure him for the sake of serving any other person, that I ask you to be clear and decided in what you propose to him, so as that it may stand for a real bargain, and may not prove a hard one either. The sum I have mentioned seems very little, considered as the rent of the farm; but I assure you it will cost William a great outlay before it can be brought into any thing like profitable condition."

"You are quite right, Mary; and the more I think of it, the more I am convinced that both William and I might be substantially benefited by such an arrangement."

"Well, then, Thomas, since we have brought our busi-



ness matters so far toward a conclusion, I must leave you. But, womanlike, you see, I have been talking all this while upon a mere supposition. There is nothing done yet. I am far from sure there ever will be. It is quite possible your uncle may live for years to come, though I have begun to think otherwise. You know, too, what a difficult person he is to deal with. Peter may come again, and entirely undo the little that is done. Indeed, I am very much afraid he will. So don't calculate too much, Thomas, upon any successful result. I am only a woman, after all—very ignorant of law, and altogether unpracticed in such matters as I have taken in hand. I have not a friend to advise me either. Indeed, nobody beyond yourself knows exactly what I am aiming at; for, you see, I could not even have a definite aim without your entire concurrence. So again I say, do not be too sanguine—do not expect too much. It may all fall to the ground even yet.”

“No, Mary, that blessed conviction that I have a friend in you will never fall to the ground—a friend who will pray for me, who has prayed for me when I dared not, or would not, pray for myself. Nothing can deprive me of this conviction; and come what will, I believe this simple fact will do more for me than the possession of all I ever wished for on earth.”

With fresh assurances that in this conviction he could never be disappointed, Mary now took leave of her cousin and hastened home, afraid lest any one should have been wondering at her absence.

So far, then, again all was well, much better than she had dared to hope; for the promise which her cousin had made her was, to a temperament like his, one of those bonds of security which the strong may despise, but which are often of essential service to the weak. She had not asked it of him. It had been voluntarily,



yet solemnly made ; and as such she accepted it with thankfulness for the present, and with hope for the time to come.

And now what to do next Mary did not very well know. There were points of law on which she sadly wanted to be better informed. She knew an elderly gentleman, a friend of her father's, a solicitor, living about eight or ten miles from the nearest market town, in whom she had the most implicit confidence ; but how was she to inspire the same confidence in others ? Besides, what right had she to bring a strange lawyer to the house, or to introduce any one in this way to the family, entirely upon her own responsibility ?

Sorely perplexed with the weight and the urgency of these considerations, Mary begged, on her return home, to be allowed to retire for the night, and to leave the nurse in attendance upon the patient ; for besides wanting, especially at this crisis, so to collect her thoughts as to lay her plans with prudence and efficiency, she felt that the time had come for husbanding her own strength. For this purpose she had been anxious to introduce the nurse, who, from her long acquaintance with the family, could take almost any part in the duties of the household without being regarded as an intruder.

For a long time Mary could not sleep—only think. She would have thought aloud, and told her troubles to her husband ; but he seemed weary, and little inclined for conversation, and, with the long story she would have to unfold, his night's rest would be sadly disturbed. So she concluded to leave all such explanations until a more suitable time, and, if possible, so far to forget them for the present as to obtain a little sleep herself.

From a sort of half slumber long delayed, Mary was suddenly startled by the nurse, who came about the first



glimpse of dawn to tell her that Mr. Ashton wished to see her. Mary went immediately, and on reaching the side of his bed he said hastily, "We shall want another lawyer."

Mary thought he must be dreaming; but she answered with composure,

"That want can be easily supplied."

"Do you know any body?—any honest man?" he continued; "for I have made up my mind, come what will, that I'll get out of this fellow's clutches if I can."

Mary's heart bounded at these words. She could scarcely breathe. But she answered, with such calmness as she could command, that her father had a friend in whom he had the most implicit confidence, and whose character, she believed, had never been spoken of with the least suspicion.

"I wish you could see him, Mary, and talk to him as you talked to me. I can not forget your words. But then you are only a woman, and women know so little—almost nothing, one may say."

"True, father, I feel that myself, and I have been thinking the same thoughts as you—that we want a friend to consult with who knows all the ins and outs of these business matters. Would you like me to go and see this friend of ours?"

"*Could* you go? Do you think you could see him?"

"Oh yes! I have no doubt but I could. I know him very well."

"But I don't want people to get talking, Mary. I am so confused myself that I can not bear them coming about me, and one giving one opinion, and one another. It bewilders me quite."

"I don't wonder at it. Indeed, I don't think you are fit for any thing of this kind. One clear-headed adviser, if a true and conscientious man, would do more for you



than we can do altogether. But will you promise me one thing, father?"

"What is that?"

"That, if Peter should come while I am away, you won't go back to your old transactions with him, but just keep quiet, and promise nothing."

"You don't think he will come, do you?"

"I am not sure—one never *can* be sure of him. It will be a long day's journey to me, and you will be left entirely to your own guidance if he should come. There will be nobody to help you but that good God who knows our trials, and is ever at hand to strengthen us in doing right. Do you think you can bear this in mind, father, that He will help you, if only you will strive your utmost to do right?"

"I'll try, Mary. But had they not better be told to keep Peter away if he should come?"

"No, I think not; for that would give him a handle for saying that you had been forcibly dealt with when you were weak and helpless, and so that whatever you might do under such circumstances would not be your own act and will. I think you had much better see Peter if he comes; but do, I entreat you, be on your guard."

"Well, I'll try, Mary. That's all I can say. But you know we farmers are not up to long argumentations about points of law, and such-like. Take us out of our ridges and furrows, and we are as simple as children."

"Then just be simple, father—don't attempt to be any thing else. You can never cope with Peter on his own ground; but you *can* stand upon what is right, and that is always the best and the surest ground. Keep only to that, and I have no fear for you; but once lose hold of the simple right, and, with such a man as Peter, you are



utterly gone. Now, do you think I may venture to leave you? for, if I make this journey, I must be stirring early. I should like to get back to-night."

"To-night! To be sure you must be back to-night."

"I answer in your own words, then—I'll try. We can neither of us do more than that. But I see the morning is beginning to break. I must not stay another minute. So good-by again. Nurse will take good care of you. Your medicine will last until the doctor comes. So once more good-by, and remember to hold fast by the right."

Mary now knew exactly what to do, and she set about it in rather a remarkable manner; for the first thing she did was to go down stairs into the kitchen, when, taking the key of the stable from a hook on which it always hung for the night, she went to where her husband kept his favorite mare, an animal much celebrated for its speed upon the road. Here her unusual appearance at that hour caused considerable excitement, which was soon allayed by a plentiful feed of corn which she poured into the manger; and then doing the same kind service to a fine pony, which Benjamin was proud to call his own, she returned to the house, and going up stairs to the boy himself, endeavored, for some time ineffectually, to rouse him from his early morning sleep.

"Benjy," she said, when at last he was partially awake, "I want you to get up. I want somebody to take a long ride with me to-day. Will you be the man? Come, I know you will. So make haste, for it is business, and not play, we are going about—urgent business of your father's. We shall have to start very early, and we must have a good breakfast too. I am going to ride William's mare, and you, of course, your pony. They have both had a feed of corn, so you need not give them any more; only groom them well, and look to my saddle, will you?"



It is so long since it has been used, I don't know what condition it may be in."

Had Ben been fully awake, nothing could have sounded more to his liking than this proposal; but it came at the wrong time to take effect in any very pleasing manner. However, he jumped up as soon as Mary had left him; and, when once his sleep was shaken off, he was soon ready both for the breakfast and the ride.

Mary had now something more to do, requiring a much longer interview with her husband; for there was a large amount of preliminary matter to explain, besides this extraordinary enterprise, which admitted of no delay; and William, hurriedly awoke out of sleep, was by no means quick to apprehend what Mary was perhaps a little *too* quick to narrate.

Indeed, Mary, as might well be supposed, was just at that time in a state of most unusual excitement, so much so, that she had great difficulty in finding the hat and habit which were wanted for her journey; for she never, under any circumstances, forgot those little personal niceties which made her always agreeable-looking, if not absolutely handsome. Besides which, she felt on the present occasion that she must not disgrace her young escort, who had been almost forcibly pressed into her service.

While Mary was dressing, and trying to make things fit which had not been worn for many months, she was also endeavoring to explain to William all which had passed, not only just then with his father, but on the previous evening with his cousin. But William, like most men dragged into this kind of hasty confidence, in which they occupy only a subordinate place themselves, was extremely dense, and either could not or would not understand. So that Mary had a very tough piece of work in the outset of her long day's journey, and with difficulty



even obtained from her husband permission to ride his favorite mare.

"You can't ride her," he said, rather sharply. "She's not fit for a woman to ride. She's too spirited by half."

"I think I can manage her," said Mary, "if you will only trust me. You know I used to ride a good deal."

William, if the truth must be told, yielded but a sullen consent. He thought surely his wife must be taking leave of her senses; and as to all she was telling him, which she repeated in rather a hurried manner, and in a somewhat fragmentary form, he said he could make neither head nor tail of it. Mary wished now that she had explained to him the night before the nature of her interview with his cousin; but, as already said, he had retired to rest unusually early; and, besides, her own heart was too full of conflicting thoughts, which she had considered it most prudent to keep to herself until the morning. The turn which the old man's mind had taken during the night had thrown all things out of their expected course, and Mary could only have recourse to woman's last alternative by appealing to William's tenderness, and asking him—imploring him, as he loved her, to trust her just through the events of that single day, after which she would explain every thing to him, and show him that all was right.

A little appeased, William next expressed his desire to accompany his wife; but Mary answered, no; they must not both leave the invalid together, for who could tell what might happen? Peter, she reminded her husband, might come.

"And if he should," said William; "what then?"

"Why, if I were you," replied Mary, "I would go a good deal into the room, just so as to show that you had a right to be there; but I would still leave them a little while alone, or Peter might say we did not let the old man have fair play."



With these and many other directions, Mary snatched a hasty breakfast, and then mounted her horse. A very proud boy was Benjamin that day; for, besides the becoming effect of a hat and habit upon Mary's face and figure, she was one of the best riders in that part of the country. Before her marriage she had scarcely had a competitor in this way; and now the freshness of the early morning, added to the hopefulness of her own heart in the business she was about, gave a glow to her cheeks, and a happy animation to her whole appearance, which made her young companion think he had never seen so charming a woman before.

In fact, Benjamin had never regarded Mary in this light at all. In his first acquaintance with her he had looked upon her only as a Methodist—the lowest type of humanity in his estimation. Then she rose a little higher in his regard, as a good manager—a sort of tidy body; then still higher, as a brisk, cheerful companion; then higher, as a good nurse; but highest of all, as a brave-hearted woman, as she had proved herself on the night of his father's accident. To all these the crowning charm was added now by her splendid riding, a charm which Mary quite unconsciously heightened by chatting ever and anon in a cheerful and familiar way about the merits of different horses, and describing some of their wonderful feats and peculiarities which had fallen under her notice in her girlhood.

To Benjamin's listening ear, and excited attention, this was more than music—above sublimity itself. He could conceive of nothing to equal it. Had Mary been studying to gain his heart, she could not have done so more effectually. Her throne became established there; and ever after that memorable ride, the merits of all other women, individually and collectively, were tested by those of his sister Mary, as the highest standard of female excellence.



Mary was so fortunate as to find her friend at home. She had made sure of the early morning hours for that purpose; and while she held her long consultation with him, her companion looked after the horses, as well as himself, so that all were in spirits for the journey home. The way seemed much longer to Mary, however, than it had done in going, and the night was closing in before the lights from the windows of the old farm-house, gleaming through the scattered trees about the outskirts of the wood, afforded welcome promise of rest. Her young companion described her as "game to the last." Alas for his encomiums! He did not see her immediately after she had entered her own room, when her hat was thrown off, and Nancy was bathing her forehead and temples with cold water, and loosening her habit to give her more room to gasp for breath. But Mary never fainted. She was only tired—so thoroughly tired that her strength, she thought, would scarcely have held out for another mile, though she only knew how tired she really was after she had dismounted.

Little, however, did Mary think of these trifling inconveniences or sufferings, since she had succeeded so well in her mission. In fact, all had been arranged in the most satisfactory manner with the friend whose advice she had sought, and who had promised to hold himself in readiness to come to her, at any time she might desire, on the shortest notice. But while all that she had learned from this friend tended to cheer and sustain her, she had now, on the other hand, to hear with dismay, that the much-dreaded visit from Peter had taken place during her absence.

William feared the interview had been too much for his father. He said he was evidently not so well. He had asked for Mary so often, that he thought she had better see him that night. So, after she had refreshed



herself with a change of clothing and a good cup of tea, Mary went into the sick man's room.

It was very distressing to see the patient as he was now—frightened, irritated, disturbed in every way. He assured Mary, however, that Peter had gained no new advantage over him; that he had withstood him with all his might; and that, much as Peter had tried to sift him, and harrow him, he had told him nothing, and mentioned nobody beyond themselves.

"You did well," said Mary. "I don't think you could have done better. I only wonder how you bore it all."

"You may wonder indeed. It was like being fried on a gridiron. You never heard how he went on—sometimes smooth, and sometimes rough. I don't know which was the worst."

"I can not imagine what you could say to him."

"Nor I neither. I don't know what I *did* say. For, you see, it was of no use talking about right and wrong, and those things that you talk about—none in the world to Peter."

"Well," said Mary, "let us all try to get a little sleep now. I think I have found a better friend than Peter, who will come and see you whenever you wish for him."

"Have you? I wish he was here just now."

"Would you like him to come to-morrow?"

"Above every thing I should. Do you know, Mary, I am not quite satisfied about the wound in my leg. It pains me a good deal. Nurse looked at it to-night, and saw nothing, she said; but I don't think her sight is very clear. I wish you would look at it. Perhaps you could do something to ease it, or lay me differently."

Notwithstanding her fatigue, Mary did not hesitate a moment, but set about the lengthy business of unfolding a variety of wrappers and bandages, in order to ascertain, for the old man's satisfaction, that all was right.



The injury from the accident had not been confined to a mere fracture. There was also a wound of considerable extent, and Mary had never felt quite sure that this was progressing in the right way. After a very careful examination, however, she saw nothing much worse than usual; and when she had replaced all the bandages, she had the comfort of hearing the patient say that he felt easier, and thought he should sleep.

There was still something to be done. A letter might be got off that night by taking it to a toll-gate about a mile distant, through which a coach passed at midnight; and Mary immediately wrote a short note to the friend she had seen that day, requesting he would set out to come to them without delay, as soon as that note should be delivered.

"Now, William," she said, "will you take this to the toll-bar, and ask the man to be sure to give it to the guard, with a trifle to make him remember it? They will think more of it if you go yourself."

William willingly consented to do this service for his wife, for her heroic example seemed unconsciously to inspire every one with a nobler energy to do what he could. And now, at last, Mary began to prepare for rest—that rest which she so sorely needed, but which, even now, she could not obtain without a number of preliminary plunges, sometimes in the sea, sometimes over precipices, but always on a fiery charger which she had no power to restrain.

## CHAPTER IX.

MARY arose on the following day to encounter an unusual amount of important duties, for which she required all the clearness of mind, and all the fortitude she could command. These duties were rendered at once more



serious and more urgent by a discovery which she made at an early hour, that the pain of which the patient had complained arose from a very unfavorable change in the state of his wounded limb. For a short time her skillful and soothing applications afforded relief; and her friend, the lawyer, true to his promise, arrived while the patient lay in a quiet and perfectly collected state.

The business, which was immediately entered upon, was arranged to Mary's satisfaction, and, indeed, to that of all the parties most concerned; for William had been made fully acquainted with every particular that morning; and although, on the previous night, he might have felt a little piqued that his wife should have acted so much on her own responsibility, he now assured her, with the most cordial proofs of his approval, that she could not have done better, nor did he think any other woman in the world could have done so well.

Mary had been only just in time with all that she undertook. When the doctor arrived in the after part of that day, he pronounced the symptoms which she had discovered indicative of the most serious consequences; and Mary had the solemn duty to discharge of making the old man acquainted with his real situation. With all her accustomed earnestness, yet with the tenderest compassion, Mary did this, losing sight of all worldly considerations in the intense anxiety which she felt about his poor neglected soul. All that the most affectionate solicitude—the most fervent zeal could dictate, Mary did; and if her patient and untiring efforts were not crowned with any triumphant success, *she* was never heard to speak of the old man in the language of condemnation; nor could those who were most intimate with her ever detect, on her part, that she had even mentally pronounced upon him the sentence of the lost. If Mary was strong to hate iniquity, she considered it no part of hers



to pass judgment on the sinner, especially after death had sealed his irrevocable doom.

In one respect the old man passed to the grave more peacefully than he would have done, had he been left to his own, or to other people's wicked devices. He lived to see the heinous nature of the wrong which had been committed; and whatever satisfaction belonged to his closing hours was derived from the sense of having done something at least to retrieve the cruel injuries of the past. But his death at last was a suffering one, such as Mary and the nurse alone had strength to witness. When all was over, it was felt by every one in the family that what had taken place was of too solemn a character to admit of the indulgence even of a secret feeling of relief; and it was long before any thing like genuine cheerfulness was restored to the household at Forest Farm.

All had, in fact, their own burdens to bear—all their own calculations to make upon the future; and, beyond that, all had their own errors and shortcomings to regret. Perhaps no one felt this more than Bessy. She was of a nature to be peculiarly affected by the spectacle of physical suffering, and also by the awful transition from active life to the silence of the grave. Little as was the affection which she had sometimes manifested for her father while living, she could not forget him when dead; and, notwithstanding the bright future now opening upon herself and the one being in the world whom she had ever truly loved, she remained to be for a long time the deepest mourner over her father's grave.

Mary never made any close inquiry of Bessy as to the real cause of her tears, neither did she attempt to check them. She hoped they had a deeper source than mere natural feeling, and that compunction, as well as filial



tenderness, was at the root from whence they flowed. Once, and only once, in one of those outbursts of emotion to which Bessy was subject, did Mary come at any thing like a solution of the true state of her mind. Bessy declared that she never had believed in any body's religion until she knew Mary; but "now," she said, "I'll be of no religion but yours for life; and if there is ever such a little company of Methodists to be found in America, I'll make one of them."

Mary could not help smiling at her sister's earnestness, but assured her it mattered little what outward profession she embraced, if she was but a Christian in heart and life; and she recommended her to keep closely to her Bible, rather than to be too anxious about connecting herself with any religious community, until her own mind should become more imbued with the principles of eternal truth. In cases like hers, she told her, secret prayer was more necessary than public praise. In this way they would each remember the other in their distant homes, while the same Heavenly Father, she doubted not, would graciously listen to them both, and bring them, she fervently hoped, to His own eternal home at last.

Those are indeed solemn seasons in human experience when the long-closed heavens seem to open above our heads, and showers of unexpected mercy fall upon our path. The storm and the tempest we set ourselves to resist, and the long pinching of the bitter frost, seems to harden our rebellious nature. But the dew, and the sunshine, and the genial showers, coming when we least expect them—who can be otherwise than softened under their combined influence?

It was thus in the little household at Forest Farm, to which the once outcast cousin now came as a frequent and welcome guest. He was, in fact, the rightful owner



of the entire property; but it seemed to pain him to be openly treated as such. He wanted only to be like a brother, he said, in that now peaceful and happy household, where Bessy and her mother still remained; the one for life, the other only until the time of her marriage, when she and Thomas were to proceed immediately to Canada. Benjamin also was to remain, and make himself useful upon the farm; for, as William said, even with the united wisdom of their two heads, and the labor of their hands, there would be enough to do to reclaim the land from its condition of long mismanagement and neglect.

Mary could now work after her heart's desire in making the old house not only habitable, but comfortable in every part. Nor was her attention confined to the interior capabilities of the mansion. All around the house—the old-fashioned windows and porch, the small pretense to a garden, and the wide grass-grown orchard—every thing appertaining to *home* came under her transforming power, so far as the simplest means of improvement could be made to extend; and all began, in a very short space of time, to assume a different aspect. The capabilities of the place were, indeed, considerable; and Mary had a great gift for planning and arranging so as to make the most of every thing. She herself worked hard; yet so often pressing Benjamin into her service, that William sometimes laughingly remonstrated, and said he had no help from the boy himself. All, however, worked harmoniously, as well as diligently; and so the domestic machine went cheerily on from day to day in its routine of united duties, bringing every one to their nightly rest with wearied limbs, yet seldom without a thankful heart.

All, however, was not perfect peace nor perfect comfort at the farm. There were elements of discord with-



out, of sufficient violence to disturb the family for many wearisome days of strife and bitterness. Peter Ashton was prepared, or said he was prepared, stoutly to contest the validity of the last will made by his uncle, and the whole family had to prepare for entering upon what appeared likely to be a tedious and most unpleasant lawsuit.

In consequence of this stormy prospect before them, the marriage of Thomas Ashton with his cousin was deferred, as it seemed important that he should remain on the spot while the law proceedings were going on; and, whatever might be felt by others in consequence of this delay, Mary was well pleased that time should be allowed her cousin for proving, among his former acquaintances, that he was resolved to begin a new and a better life—a resolution which he maintained so nobly, that even those who had formerly entertained the worst opinion of him began to change their tone and manner altogether, speaking of him not unfrequently as one more sinned against than sinning. Nor was this change of opinion less striking when it became generally known that he was the rightful owner of Forest Farm.

After a great deal of threatening and bluster on the part of Peter Ashton, his antagonistic proceedings began, in some measure, to subside. He never confessed, in so many words, that he had *given the matter up*; but there were prudential reasons, closely connected with his own character and position, which operated powerfully against his venturing upon any public encounter likely to result in an exposure of his secret practices; and, under the pressure of these considerations, he did virtually, if not confessedly, give the matter up.

William was more than half inclined to turn round upon Peter, and compel him to refund all the money he had received from old Mr. Ashton while occupying the



farm; but Thomas preferred letting that matter rest. It was dangerous, he said, to begin to stir in foul waters, and, for his part, he would make his brother welcome to his unjustly acquired gains.

So peace was at last the portion of the family; and then there was the preparation for a long, long journey, and a quiet country wedding, to occupy all parties; and sisterly thoughts and plans among the women, and brotherly kindnesses among the men, filled up the intervals of more active service. And over all there rested, like a golden cloud, a blessed sense of Divine goodness and protection, and in every heart a deep conviction, never more to be effaced, that there is something in the simple *right* more precious than any thing which this world can offer when right is violated, or even lightly esteemed.

## K







# GEORGE MILBANK.

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## CHAPTER I.

THERE are few types of the true Englishman more genuine than that which is indicated by the expression, "a Manchester man." Such a man, not living in Manchester, but in one of those large, lately-grown manufacturing towns which emulate the career of that prosperous city, was George Milbank. All his associations were of the same class—earnest, direct, solid. In the populous and rising town of Highcliff, where he and his brother Charles now carried on an extensive manufacturing business, their father, who had sprung from the ranks of the working people, had made his way to wealth and influence by the very qualities which descended in no inferior degree upon his sons. But the sons had this advantage over their father—that their education had been pursued at an excellent school, where, if they had never gone very deeply into classic lore, they had been well instructed in the elements of general science, and thus had returned home with a more valuable stock of intelligence than is always the accompaniment of a strictly classical education.

Both brothers, as boys, were warm-hearted, fearless, honest, and true. Their characters at school had that rare merit of standing almost equally well with their teachers, and their companions. George was more manly, and altogether more capable than his younger brother Charles. He had a fine person, cast in a somewhat Herculean mould, with an open, handsome countenance,



deep manly voice, and such a laugh as did the heart good to hear it.

But, in connection with these strong and sterling qualities, George had that true English tendency to shyness, or rather sensitiveness, not unfrequently allied, as in his case, with powers which might easily be so exercised as to excite terror in others. Strange contradiction! Yet how often do we see, among our countrymen, the most indomitable resolution associated with the tenderest sensitiveness on certain points; and a spirit that would do battle with a force ten times stronger than its own, quailing before some imaginary or secret foe. The great muscular form, too, with courage and determination written upon every joint and muscle, how it can flinch and tremble when certain words are spoken, or when covert meanings are implied; in fact, when attacked by any of those peculiar weapons of warfare which it has little skill in using, and still less in warding off.

Thus it was that George Milbank left school an extremely bashful youth, much addicted to blushing, and also to blundering sometimes, especially when placed in any new or doubtful position, or, as he called it, "thrown off his own ground." George was very sensible of these weaknesses of his, and he hated them. He was sensible, almost too much so, of all his defects and shortcomings. He knew how much his movements wanted grace; but his limbs were so large, and had such power in them, it was very difficult to make them move gracefully. He knew there were certain defects in his mode of speech—a tendency to the provincialisms of his native county, which, though sometimes very expressive, he would have been glad to lay entirely aside on certain occasions; but, having no fine ear for the little niceties of speech, he never could entirely master this matter, and so continued, to the end of his life, to do battle with the



letter *h*, in such a manner that it was apt to escape him, like a half-conquered enemy, and to rise up again in some unexpected place, heading a small force which it never had any right to command.

By degrees, however, the manly, well-knit form of George Milbank, his handsome face, his sterling sense, and generous heart, with a manner always frank and cordial, so won upon the good-will of society, that he found himself, to his own surprise, a general favorite in the circle by which he was surrounded. His younger brother, Charles, was scarcely less so, though inferior to George in talent and force of character. Together they formed an admirable pair, always united in heart, though occasionally differing in opinion, and universally spoken of as the best fellows in existence.

It was, perhaps, well for this quality of power belonging so remarkably to George, that he was a Dissenter by birth and bringing up, because that gave him more elbow-room for doing battle against all abuses and grievances, and perhaps a little, at times, against some things by law established. Of course there were many who wished to lay hold of him as a powerful machine to do their party work for them; his voice was so rich and deep; his eloquence, though untrained, so stirring and forcible. But George drew back in early life from sheer modesty, and sometimes from a certain kindliness of heart, which made him shrink from creating enemies.

But as the man grew within him—the man of business, of influence, and of public rights—George became bolder. Besides which, he could not help feeling his own power; and the pleasure of using it in a good cause was a strong inducement to lead him across the narrow boundary of domestic privacy into the wide field of public usefulness, of public effort, and, if it must be so, of public strife.



About the time when his popularity was rising to an almost alarming height, George made the acquaintance of a family whose habits and modes of thought, though differing widely from his own, were no barrier against intimacy with a wealthy and prosperous manufacturer of good standing in society. A lady, the widow of an officer, with three elegant daughters, was residing in a genteel way on a small income, in the old city of Chester; and these George Milbank fell in with at different musical parties; for he was an enthusiastic lover of music, and his own voice, with its rich deep tones, was in great requisition among his friends. The widow's oldest daughter, Jane, was much admired for her skill as a performer, though she did not sing. Her ear, naturally fine, had been trained to the minutest perception of musical sounds, while her white fingers flew over the instrument with a magical touch, that was almost as wonderful to see as the sounds produced were wonderful to hear.

George Milbank watched these movements, and listened to these sounds, until he became perfectly enchanted. The graceful performer sometimes looked up and smiled—it might be at his simplicity; but she certainly did smile, and that was enough for George. His place was always beside the piano whenever they met; and then came the lending of pieces of music, and after that, handsomely-bound copies made presents of to the lady. George delighted in making costly presents—it was a luxury he could not deny himself; and the lady, to whom costly things were somewhat difficult of attainment, found it equally impossible to deny herself the luxury of accepting them.

So matters went on, until Charles Milbank grew alarmed, and spoke to his brother, though half-jokingly, about the lengths he was going with that piece of fine ladyism;



may, he even went so far, on one occasion, as to call the lady a "sharp-faced vixen." What profanation, when she had been to George a very fountain of soft harmonies and dulcet sounds! George only laughed his great, hearty laugh; but he felt rather queer afterward, for he had a sort of constitutional tendency to attach weight to the opinions of those whom he loved or esteemed—all modest and sensitive people have; and this strange expression of his brother's not only startled him at first, but dwelt upon his mind afterward; in fact, until he saw the lady and heard her play again.

George now made the acquaintance of the mother, a most affable and pleasing lady; and very gratifying it was to him to hear that the daughter had spoken of him to her mother—had spoken especially of his fine voice; while there were many other pleasing little facts connected with himself which the mother must have gathered from the same source, and which she contrived to lay before him in a very flattering manner.

Could it be possible that, with all his solid and good qualities, there was room in George Milbank's noble heart for vanity? No, no. Only love of approbation. No sensitive or bashful person ever was without that, or why should they blush and feel abashed—timid and disheartened about what they are or what they do, except from an ever-present desire that it should be admired or thought well of by others, with a proportionate fear that it may not?

So George grew much better pleased with himself, and felt in high good-humor every time the lady mother talked with him in this strain; and the confidence thus added to his usual style of behavior rendered him at once more gentlemanly and more agreeable in the presence of the widow and her daughters than he was himself aware of. To make the matter short, it was not



many weeks before he had become a frequent visitor at their house, nor many more before he went there as an accepted lover.

Perhaps the most difficult part of this business to George, though the offer itself must have been rather difficult, unless he was kindly helped through it by the other party, was the telling what he had done, and how the case stood, to his brother Charles. Words are often wholly inadequate to express what is felt under any sudden emotion, and Charles Milbank remained perfectly silent on this occasion. George would have given any thing for him to speak. He had expected some violent outburst; but this dead silence was utterly confounding, and for a while his great heart felt as if it was sinking into some lower region of his body.

When Charles looked full into his brother's face he could not be mistaken in the uncomfortable impression which his silence was producing; and still finding it impossible to say any thing to the purpose on this subject, he opened his lips on another, by doing which he hoped to be able to take something off from the sharp edge of this.

"Well," he said, "I suppose we may both make up our minds to be set down as a couple of fools together; for when I was at Scarborough last week I met the Mapletons, and was with them nearly all the time. You remember Mrs. Mapleton, my father's cousin, and one of those girls—the youngest—Grace—"

"What of her?" asked George, not feeling very much elated by the prospect of such a connection, if that was what his brother meant.

"I don't know what of her," replied Charles, with much simplicity, "except that I can't get her out of my head, whatever I do."

"How did she get in?" inquired his brother.



"Nay, I don't know that either. But the long and the short of it is, I believe I shall start off to-morrow to that place in the north where they live; and, if I find her at home all that I think she must be, why then I'll make proposals—that's what I mean to do."

"I thought they were so poor," observed George, rather objectingly.

"They are no worse for that," replied Charles, somewhat sharply, "if they don't make pretensions beyond their means. You know *we* have plenty, and are likely to have more."

"But," said George, still hesitating, and by no means cordial in his manner, "don't you think a mother situated like Mrs. Mapleton might have been induced to make a little more of you than she otherwise would, in the hope—"

"George, George!" exclaimed Charles, "are you blind, and deaf, and stupid, that you don't see your own case exactly in that which you point out to me as a warning? I tell you once for all, that I don't like, and I'm afraid I never shall like, that connection of yours; because they seem to me to be people of pretension, without one thought or one feeling in common with you, so that all you will have to make you happy as a husband will be the jingle of a piano, and that you may grow in time to hate to hear."

"Well," said George, "that's what I call plain speaking. Have you any thing more of the same kind to say, Charles?"

"I'm sorry to say it, George—more sorry to say it to you, my dear fellow, than words can describe. Yet I don't—upon my life, I don't see, how you can expect to be happy with that woman."

"Why not?"



"Because, as I have said before, you have nothing in common—are alike in nothing."

"When I think gravely, and reason upon it, Charles, I take great encouragement from that. Try just for a moment to look at the thing in the same light as I do, and you will see it in this way. You and I, you know, are only roughish kind of chaps. Plenty of cash in our pockets makes us pass easily enough in some places. But what we want, above every thing else, is a little more polish—a little more knowledge of how things should be conducted to make them go genteelly. I hardly know how to describe what I mean, but I know there is a want of something, and a sad want to me, for I feel it every day."

"Better have that want in your house, than in your heart, George."

"Ah! but you don't know Jane—perhaps you wouldn't understand her if you did."

"Do *you* understand her?"

"Of course I do. And I tell you she is one of those who don't carry their feelings on the surface, for every body to see."

"Has she any to carry, think you?"

"Don't be hard, Charles, but trust to me. Do you think I'm likely to marry a woman with no feeling?"

"If you do, George, you're ruined. Above all men in the world, you want a kind, feeling woman for your wife. Suppose she has a sharp tongue, George, and cuts at you, and sneers and snubs you, as some women can, what will become of you, my brave, great-hearted fellow?"

George laughed his great laugh again. He felt very brave just then, and great-hearted too. He did not know what a sharp-pointed bill could do—peck, peck, pecking at him every day.



## CHAPTER II.

THE two brothers were married within the same year, and brought home their brides to houses magnificently fitted up. All that money could do to embellish, as well as to render convenient and comfortable, was done in these two mansions, which stood, one in the town of Highcliff, and the other a little way out. It is needless to say any thing of the taste displayed in these arrangements, only that George had a natural leaning toward what was gorgeous, and especially what was costly. Indeed, he valued money only for what it could do; and that, of course, included what it could purchase. So he liked to see embodied in what was around him a certain amount of gold, and work, and color. He liked things heavy, and rich, and glowing. He liked strong patterns and striking effects. Thus his large mansion was quite a show, when the furniture was first brought in. He enjoyed it exceedingly himself, as he walked about on his rich soft carpets, thinking how delighted Jane would be.

But Jane had by nature a different taste. It had been very differently cultivated, too; and one of the first suggestions which she had to make was, that the drawing-room carpet should be changed for something more quiet. Yes, actually changed!—that magnificent carpet which George had chosen himself, and paid, he scarcely ventured to tell how much for—it was so absurd, he said; though, for his part, he did not mind a bit what he gave for a carpet—not he.

Jane Milbank was very mild in her voice and general deportment—gentle, her manners would have been called; but it was rather like the gentleness which comes



by trying to be gentle—not at all resulting from tenderness. She was, in fact, never violent or extreme in any thing. She was too ladylike for that. All that she did, and much that she said, had the effect of being tinged with a large amount of neutral tint, while her husband eschewed her cool grays altogether. A mere looker-on would have said of these two, in their married lot, that the husband would carry all before him, and have every thing his own way, and that the wife had no chance whatever in any case of difference of opinion; yet the drawing-room carpet *was* changed, and that pretty quickly.

To the other mansion, which Charles Milbank had fitted up not quite so gorgeously, there came a happy, grateful bride, who trod the carpets as if they had been rose-beds; and to her they were so, only divested of their thorns. If she saw a fault in any thing, it was lost sight of the next moment in the exuberance of her delight, and her thankfulness that so much had been done to make her happy. And when she saw the dingy rooms adjoining the mill, in which her husband had been content to spend the greater portion of his time before he married, she felt perfectly abashed at the idea of being herself the cause of all this new and momentous change, by which they were both surrounded with an amount of comfort and embellishment, that, while it dazzled her eye, had the effect of melting her heart with tenderness and gratitude.

Grace Milbank was a very different woman from Jane, though quite as intelligent, and, with the exception of some accomplishments, as well educated too. It had been a great object with her parents to give all their children a plain, good education. For this they straitened and denied themselves during many years; but, having discharged this duty, they knew that their chil-



dren, even their daughters, must make their own way in the world; and Grace was entering upon her third year as a governess, when, in those pleasant summer holidays which the family always spent together, crowding as much enjoyment as possible into the short space of six weeks, she had met Charles Milbank on the footing of a distant relative.

But it was not Grace alone who had charmed the young man's fancy, or rather his heart. He had no sister of his own, and he and his brother had suffered also from that great affliction—the loss of a mother in very early life. Thus the social family union of the Mapletons, the female companionship, with a good, kind mother as the centre and source of so much of their enjoyment, had presented a picture of domestic happiness altogether so attractive to the young man, that he very naturally persuaded himself that a flower transplanted from such a garden would bring much of the same perfume and the same beauty to his own. Nor was he disappointed in his calculations. Grace had been nurtured in an atmosphere of love and truth. She was herself especially real in all she said and did; and she had known just enough of the sterner discipline of life to enter heartily into its comforts, and even its luxuries, without allowing them in any way to spoil her character.

In all their habits and modes of thinking the two brides, as already said, were extremely different. But having married so nearly at the same time, and in a manner which threw them into close and frequent intercourse, it was almost impossible not to become either very intimate, or to live entirely separate. Circumstances threw them very much upon the former alternative, for they had continually something to discuss and arrange, in which each could benefit the other. Jane could dictate—Grace could execute. Jane could lay



down the law as to all matters of form and etiquette, and no one would have ventured to dispute with her there; while Grace had sound judgment, and much practical skill of her own, with a ready hand wherever help was wanted, which proved of essential service to her sister-in-law. Grace, too, could manage much better with the people around her than seemed possible to Jane. She had a pleasant, cheerful, courteous manner, which set every body at ease, and offended none; while Jane could not bring herself to be quite so agreeable to those whom she considered ill-bred people, as the nature of her position and circumstances required; and it is quite possible that she would scarcely have known how to recommend herself to some with whom she was now brought into contact, even if she had been more anxious to do so than, in the secret of her heart, she really was.

So the two sisters became the friends of circumstance, as many do. Nor are such friendships to be lightly esteemed when they are carried on without rivalry, and without converting the domestic secrets which this kind of intimacy must always more or less expose into material for the gossip of a wider circle.

But how were the two brothers prospering under auspices so different in their respective homes? Charles, who had hitherto been a little obscured by his brother's popularity and influence as a public man, was beginning to hold up his head a little higher, and to feel that perhaps he also might be useful in his generation, if he did his best. And in the nice art of strengthening and encouraging him to do his best, and never giving up out of vexation that he did no better, lay the great skill of his earnest-hearted wife. Grace could be critical if she liked, for she had a cultivated understanding, and a fine ear to detect little inaccuracies of expression or pronunciation, as well as a quick eye to perceive all peculiarities



of behavior, so that she could have made her husband feel very uncomfortable sometimes if she had chosen, and perhaps look a little ridiculous too. But there was ever present to her mind, as if it came intuitively, that reference to the relative importance of things, that she would not, even in playfulness, sacrifice the greater for the lesser good; and this it was which enabled her, when her husband was advocating a noble cause, to hear him hesitate, and even stammer a little—nay, sometimes mispronounce a word; because, as she said, so long as the cause was not injured by his inefficiency, it was better that a rich man and a good man should throw the weight of his influence on the right side, than that he should stand acquitted of ever having misplaced the letter *h*.

Ah! that miserable letter! What trouble it was beginning to bring upon poor George! He never took his place in public now, but it magnified itself, and sat upon him like a nightmare, cramping his energy, and sometimes stopping him in the midst of a burst of natural eloquence; so that people, gazing up intently at the strong man in his fervor, wondered what had come over him all at once, and thought whether it had been a stitch or a spasm, when there only ran through him a sharp conviction that he had slipped off that letter from a word where it ought to be, and stuck it on to another where it ought not.

By degrees, too, as the domestic affairs over which Jane presided assumed a more elegant and *recherché* character, little French words crept in now and then, with a sprinkling of Italian occasionally; but, as the latter was confined chiefly to music, George felt less difficulty in making himself at home with it. With regard to French, Jane found it necessary to be continually instructing and correcting her husband in the use of it;



for as he observed that almost every body around him made free application of it, whether correctly or not, and as he understood it sufficiently to find a phrase now and then extremely useful, he did not see why he should not help himself out of this language as well as others. Thus, at the head of his own table, he made the experiment now and then, without, most probably, any single soul there present, except the one most nearly allied to his own, detecting the least error in his pronunciation. In fact, he was always too careful not to venture beyond his knowledge to be in much danger of committing himself. Only—here was the risk—Jane was so perpetually correcting and dictating; she caught him up so often when he was in earnest about other things, and she made him feel so intolerably absurd when afterward describing what he had said or done, that in the midst of such endless “bother,” as he called it, he did not know French from English, but, totally forgetting the use of his mother tongue, could easily have fancied himself one of the builders of the Tower of Babel.

On one occasion especially George was so grievously overtaken with this kind of confusion, that he never made the experiment of using the same words again. Every one near him, George observed, in their public speaking, and all the papers in their political articles, made frequent use of the expression *fait accompli*. Why should not he? It seemed almost as if the necessities of public usefulness required this of England’s orators of the present day. So George in private, or rather at his own table, began first to try the words upon his own tongue. They were by no means difficult, yet Jane was not satisfied. She must have something more resembling that Parisian accent, which, she persisted, might be detected in every expression, however simple. So what did George do but, a few evenings after this, when



standing on a platform in the full flow of his burning eloquence, with his large dark eyes dilated, his massive waves of black hair tossed back from his noble brow, and his arms gesticulating like a hero, as he was, or might have been—what did he do but detect himself, in his loudest peroration, saying something very much like *fait accompli*! And the eyes of his wife were upon him. Piercing, though distant, their keen glances came like sharp knives cutting the thread of his eloquence in two, and he sat down in the midst of thundering applause, with the congratulations of all around him, yet with a secret terror palpitating deep within his breast, which could scarcely have been exceeded by the conviction that he had spoken treason or blasphemy.

And thus these little torments were growing and growing around George, as the Liliputians climbed about the sleeping giant, and bound him fast with the multitude of their tiny cords, until he felt hampered and crippled in every way, and sometimes mortified beyond endurance—mortified, indeed, so far beyond what the occasion demanded, that he despised himself for the feeling, and rather gave up the act, than subject himself to such feeling again.

And all the while it was never any thing strong or violent that Jane had to say. She was an excellent wife—nobody could deny that—and loved her husband truly, if not tenderly—as much as it would have been possible for her to love any man. So much, indeed, that she wanted to make him quite perfect; and all this solicitude, which her husband vulgarly called “bother,” arose simply out of her anxiety that he should never utter a word, or commit an act, not entirely worthy of him—and of *her*.

In the first instance, she thought his loud laugh must be stopped; and in the very midst of it, when he was



the merriest and the happiest, she would shrink aside with a painful expression on her face, indicating how unable she was to bear so rude a shock. So George grew uncomfortable when he found he had been laughing, and would sometimes check himself, and become suddenly grave without any one being able to guess why.

Then George made faces when he sung, Jane said; and she made a face herself to show him how he had looked; so that he ever afterward pictured himself, while singing, as guilty of some horrid grimace. That idea threw him out of tune, and then Jane looked sharply round, with an expression that seemed to say, "That's you again—you who always put every body out." So George grew shy of his singing, and would not join, but sat apart and listened; and every one wondered what had come over him. He was not unhappy. Every thing went well with him. He was simply *snubbed*.

Pity it is that we have no better, or rather no more refined word in our language for designating this most unwholesome process, so thoroughly calculated to check and frustrate all that is hopeful, and cheering, and good. True, there may be cases in which snubbing is useful, and persons to whom it might be appropriately applied; but as a domestic or conjugal system in constant operation, it is one which represents the worst phase of that falling of water drop by drop, which has ever paralyzed the noble energies of a generous heart.

### CHAPTER III.

ONE thing must be taken into account on the side of Jane Milbank's system as it operated against her husband's public efforts—that she was no Dissenter—never had been—never could be; nor had she, either by nature or by education, the least sympathy with that onward



progress of the middle classes in which dissent is often both an active and a powerful agent. Like many persons of Jane's tendency of character, she had a very comfortable way of stepping over the middle classes in her own person altogether, and taking rank with the higher, never dreaming that those who belonged legitimately to the latter might reasonably wonder what business she had there.

But if Jane in her heart ignored all those vast and stirring interests in which her husband was so deeply implicated, she never openly opposed them. She never made any direct attack either upon dissent, or upon liberal political opinions, such as were held by her husband, his family, and his party. She was too good a wife, and too prudent a woman for that. Her sense of right and fairness, too, would have prevented her doing any thing of this kind, had she felt inclined; for, having known all about it before her marriage, and having passed these differences of opinion over as no obstacle then, she was fully aware that there could be neither reason nor justice in making them matters of dispute now.

We have already said that Jane was an excellent wife, according to her ideas of conjugal duty. She was certainly an excellent mistress. Perhaps no husband ever had a right to feel, in a higher degree than George Milbank, that his household affairs were conducted without a fault. Jane had the art of making capital servants. If she found in them by nature the qualities required, her admirable discipline soon converted them into all that she wished; wanting those qualities, they were speedily dismissed. The ladies of the neighborhood knew of no higher recommendation to a servant than that she had lived a good while with Mrs. Milbank, and had left with a character.

George admired the faultless working of his domestic



economy, just as he would have admired that of some beautiful piece of mechanism. He was rather proud of his dinners, but less and less so of himself. Here was the thorn of perpetual irritation. His self-love was so continually wounded, that it seemed as if actually dying out, and, with that, his self-confidence—almost his self-respect. He was beginning to feel within himself that he could do nothing well, could fill no place worthily, nor acquit himself as he ought under any circumstances. Had his wife attacked his principles, either religious or political, he would have argued with her stoutly, for he knew very well how to do that. Had she been violent, and open, and direct, in her opposition to him, he could have done battle, even against her. No man could have done that more powerfully, or with more forcible effect, than himself. He feared no attack in the open field—not he; and from a woman! He would have laughed, indeed, at the futility of a woman's rage against him. But this quiet eating away of all his powers of action—at least, of all his pleasure in using them—was like the gnawing of innumerable worms at the root of some majestic tree, which tries for a while, in vain, to put forth branches, to bud, and blossom, and bear fruit, but at last succumbs to the secret enemy, and tries no more.

Charles and his wife both saw that a change was being wrought in their brother's character, and not for the better. For some time this had been a subject for jest and banter with Charles; but it was fast becoming too marked and too serious for that. Grace was secretly more troubled and alarmed than she liked to tell her husband; for her quick eye had detected something of the cause, and she felt that it was one in which no third party could, without danger, interfere. A warmer admirer, or a stronger partisan than Grace, it was impossible for any brother to have. Charles used to say he



believed his wife loved him, but she perfectly worshiped George. The fact was that Grace, by a kind of intuition, growing out of her intense womanly sympathies, could thoroughly understand a character like that of George Milbank. She saw all its natural weakness, but she saw its greatness too; and passing almost heedlessly over the few trivial defects on the surface, she penetrated into its latent capabilities, longing perpetually to have them brought into light and action. "Glorious action," Grace called it; for she knew how that expansive heart was beating with the warm glow of a healthy and noble benevolence, and that it would not, and ought not, to rest without accomplishing some great work, with the good of mankind for its object.

In her secret thoughts Grace was not unfrequently engaged in planning out a course of generous, noble, and efficient action for her brother George, even more than for her husband, because she knew that, at the same time that he was better calculated for such action, he needed it more. Charles could more easily satisfy himself with business. George had native powers which demanded wider scope and objects of higher aim. How was it possible for an earnest-hearted woman like Grace, with so much of her tenderest affection clinging round this brother, to sit still and see so fine a man so likely to be utterly wasted? But then, how could she meddle in such a matter without making mischief, which might be—for who can tell to what such meddling may lead?—like firebrands thrown into their domestic and family union?

For a while, however, even Grace, with all her enthusiasm, was compelled to lay aside these considerations for cares, as well as pleasures, of a more strictly domestic nature. In becoming the happy mother of a little daughter she seemed to realize the perfect filling of her



cup of earthly enjoyment. A son had previously been born to the other house, and both mothers had enough to do for some time with those endless discussions and comparisons which little babies always create, and which, often in the most curious manner, seem to level all distinctions of rank; so that the finest lady in the land can feel an intense interest, and sometimes even a touch of jealousy, at the peep of a little tooth that will never, in all probability, have any thing to munch but the coarsest bread, and seldom enough even of that.

What, then, must have been the amount of discussion, comparison, and rivalry between these two ladies so similarly situated? We will leave them to it, for public matters were, just at this time, demanding the attention of the whole manufacturing interest, in no ordinary manner; and every man of property and influence felt himself called upon to stand forward, and declare himself either on one side or the other. The time, however, was rapidly passing for one of the parties to find a voice in the manufacturing districts. Such were the numbers with their weight thrown into the opposite scale, that the course appeared almost clear before them, only that such masses of people, with their interests lying all one way, are apt to miscalculate the weight and the force existing in a state of society widely different from their own, and with which they have no familiar acquaintance.

Some of the wiser heads of that party which represented the manufacturing body were quite aware of this. They knew that when the less enlightened people around them spoke contemptuously of old institutions, and defiantly of the worth of landed property, and the strength of those who held by it, they were speaking of what they knew very little about. It was, in fact, so well understood by such men that there *was* a power to oppose,



that every effort which it was possible to make was now enforced with the utmost energy; and public speakers and public men were called upon in every quarter, and met their friends on the platform, in committees and *soirées*, or wherever they could be met in masses, so as to produce the greatest possible effect upon the public mind.

Now, if ever in his life, George Milbank was wanted. He was wanted to harangue, to lead, to animate, to inspire. He was a host in himself; and, full of the subject, fired with hope, and encouraged by the cordial welcomes of his friends, he made on one occasion the best and most telling speech by which the movement had hitherto been celebrated. Jane was in the nursery, and George felt his power, as perhaps he had never felt it before. He felt also a kind of glory lifting him up to the occasion; and yet he was always, even in his most exalted moments, a modest man in regard to himself. He was eminently one of those who are happiest, as well as greatest, when, totally forgetful of themselves, they are carried away with the importance or the grandeur of something far beyond their own personal affairs, and with which self has nothing to do. The injury to such a man of being reminded continually and painfully of himself, what tongue shall ever tell?—to be compelled to think of the little, when the great is before him—to be told that his wings are only of wax, when he feels himself nearest to the sun!

For a while George went on triumphantly, and his brother triumphed with him, ever proud of his success. Multitudes of people were convinced—at all events, they were enraptured—and would sometimes have crowned him on the spot, had crowns been as plentiful as hats tossed high in acclamation. Grace heard of all this from her husband, and was delighted. As soon as it was at



all reasonable for her to go out, she would go to one of these meetings, and insisted upon Jane going with her. She would listen to no excuse. It was a glory to a wife, she said, to see and hear her husband exerting himself in that way for a good cause, and so successfully too. Even if Jane was indifferent about the cause itself, she must care about the honor her husband was receiving, and how richly he deserved it. So Jane yielded, somewhat reluctantly, taking care to tell her husband beforehand, how entirely she disliked that kind of thing, and how painfully she anticipated that he would commit himself in some way or other.

From some cause wholly undiscovered by the public, George Milbank was not at all himself on this occasion. He began to hesitate, then stammered, and scarcely ever, during the whole length of his speech, got on as it was expected that he would; for this was a great occasion, and George was to be *the* man of the day. Grace herself was a little disappointed, and confessed to Jane that she felt rather nervous. Jane said it was misery—absolute misery to her; and she went out before the meeting was over, making considerable disturbance as she did so.

“Now,” thought Grace, “is the time for a wife to be a *true* wife. I do hope Jane will be very tender to him, and spare him even the slightest remark.” She herself would have known exactly what to do. But Jane set upon her husband the first moment he reached home, expressing her hope that he would never, after this, attempt to open his lips in public, and declaring it would be impossible for her ever again to make one of his audience.

“Why, what have I done?” said George. “No man is always the same. What in the world have I done?”

“Done!” replied Jane, with a miserable attempt at a



laugh. "I don't know what you have done; only made me perfectly miserable, and Grace too."

"Grace!" said George, looking up suddenly. "Was Grace ashamed of me?"

"I don't know that she was ashamed—only that we were both most wretched."

"But what did Grace say?"

"She said it made her dreadfully nervous to hear you."

"Did she? Did Grace say so?"

"Yes, and more than that, I believe; but I do not exactly remember her words—we were both in such a state of confusion and distress."

"Well, you shall neither of you be made miserable by me again in the same way—you may rest satisfied about that. I will speak to Grace myself. What a pity that you either of you went! Those meetings are no fit places for you."

George felt as if there would be no rest for him until he had talked the matter fairly over with Grace. He wanted to hear the worst at once—now, while the smart was upon him. But he could not see Grace then, and so days passed over with the same feeling rankling in his heart, and becoming more painful, instead of less so, as his imagination tortured the past into something a hundred-fold worse than it really was. Indeed, it was nothing—nothing but what must happen to every public speaker at times, and is always most likely to happen when most is expected. He had simply not *got on* so well as usual. His words did not flow so easily; and, like most speakers conscious of not speaking well, he spoke longer than usual, as if perversely bent upon making bad worse.

When at last George did open his mind to Grace on the subject, she expressed the most perfect astonishment



at the serious manner in which he had been regarding what to her had passed as the mere casualty of a moment, not worthy of being thought of again in connection with the stirring and momentous questions now occupying public attention.

"But you, Grace," said George, "you yourself were so annoyed, I understand."

"I!" said Grace, astonished.

"Yes; you were miserable, nervous—I don't know what—at the spectacle of your husband's brother making such a fool of himself."

"My dear George, what can you mean? Now I think of it, I believe I did say to Jane that I felt nervous. But what of that?"

"A great deal. I consider that expression as meaning a great deal."

"Shall I tell you exactly what it does mean, George?"

"Yes, if you will; only be a little gentle and moderate. Indeed, you always *are* gentle to me. I think I could bear you to tell me any thing."

"My unfortunate expression means simply this, George—that I honor and admire you so, and have such entire confidence in the good that is in you—the great talents, and the greater nobleness—"

"Nay, Grace, you are overdoing it now. You are making game of me. I never thought you could do that."

"These are as true words as I ever spoke in my life, George, and you shall hear them out. It is because of all that I have said that I want every one to see, and hear, and think of you as I do. Why, you are my hero, George. I know of none greater than you are capable of being, with an open field and a good cause before you; and I—that is, for myself—care no more for one poor speech among twenty good ones, than a good general



cares for one battle lost where twenty are gained. You know Wellington used to say that a successful campaign was only a series of defeats; and there is no man really strong and great who has not been taught by experience how to guard against his own weakness. Besides, what was it? Nothing—the merest nothing. I delight in hearing you speak, George. I glory in you, because I know you, and believe in you; and I'm going to hear you again to-morrow.”

“No, Grace, you won't hear me again very soon, I can tell you.”

“Why not?”

“Because I can't stand this—this—I wish there was a better word for it—I mean I can't stand this perpetual snubbing. It's all right, and there's nothing I have to complain of in heart or home; but somehow I feel very often like a man who is continually having his nose pulled, and his ears pinched, and his toes trod upon, without the chance of striking a blow in return; without, in fact, knowing whom to strike or where. So I suppose I shall have to sit still in time, and give all up.”

## CHAPTER IV.

THERE was nothing which George Milbank desired less than to desert his party in their time of need. His heart was with them; and, so far as there might be any private work to do within the range of his capabilities, he was as much as ever devoted to their service, and, as he believed it, to the service of his country. But it so happened that the capabilities which George possessed in so high a degree were most especially such as fitted him for public usefulness. Many men could do the private work as well as he could, but few could stir up public feeling like him; few, indeed, possessed so entirely



the confidence of others—of those already one in mind and heart with him—and yet command so wide a range of influence in winning others over to the same opinions.

Yet from this time George declined all public speaking, beyond the mere expression of assent to what his friends had said. He would take his place on the platform with others; and he could not but feel deeply sensible of the welcome which always awaited him there. The applause which announced the simple act of his rising from his seat might have assured him how little the public had been impressed with any failure on his part, and how easy, even if he should fail again, it would be for him to recover any lost ground. He could not help perceiving and understanding all this; but the dropping well at home had already done so much of its work in half petrifying his energies, that he felt no spring within himself; and, with the failure of that, his self-reliance failed also, so that he felt sure, as he told his brother, that he *could* not speak, even if he would.

Charles looked earnestly at his brother sometimes, on these public occasions, and he saw that when the applause was loudest and most enthusiastic George was compelled actually to conceal his eyes by stooping, turning aside, or sometimes holding before him a paper, which he pretended to be reading; for there were tears, actual tears, gathering in his eyes, and ready to overflow—ready, as he would himself have said, to make a greater fool of him than ever. So deeply and so bitterly do we always regret the loss of what is best and noblest in ourselves—the giving up of that in which we most excel, when we have been accustomed to regard it in the light of an especial qualification for doing good in our generation.

George Milbank and his brother were both men who



might have received their full meed of praise without the least injury to themselves. Grace used to say they were rare men, for even flattery could not spoil them. They had less than the average amount of self-conceit; and yet they were both, but especially George, sensible in no common measure of the comfort and the value of a little hearty commendation—not of their talents or acquirements. George hated to be *over-praised*; but he *did* like to feel—what warm and kindly heart does not?—that his friends approved of what he was saying or doing, and that, so far as he created any sensation in the world, it was in accordance with their ideas of reason, as well as right.

People began to wonder in time what could be the cause of the change, which every one observed and talked about, in George Milbank. His brother could have told them, but he scrupulously avoided mentioning the subject to any one except his wife. Even to George he could but touch upon it slightly and tenderly, for he knew that the cause which could bring tears into those eyes must be attended with no ordinary suffering; and he dreaded, not without reason, that such suffering, often repeated, would have the effect of driving his brother away from public life altogether.

At length these apprehensions became realized. George failed to make his appearance when most wanted. A large meeting was held, in which he would have been the very man for the occasion. Charles Milbank stood up and did his best in an earnest speech without much eloquence, only that the feeling with which he alluded to his brother called forth thunders of applause; and he, too, thought he should have to veil his eyes, for it touched him to the quick to see and hear how his brother was looked up to, and believed in, and wished for. “And what am I,” he said to himself, “to be standing here in



that noble fellow's place?" But Charles did his best, and that is always manly; and Grace, who was present, told him afterward that he had done extremely well. So Charles was very much encouraged, and thought he would try again, if he should be asked; for, as he aimed at nothing great, there was no danger, in his case, of any great failure.

Toward the close of that day George came loitering in, and sat down beside his brother and Grace. He was evidently wanting to hear all about the meeting. Charles spared him, therefore, the pain of asking, by giving him a graphic description of all which had transpired, not omitting a few lively and playful comments upon his own performance, which Grace followed up with expressions of earnest and cordial approbation.

It was scarcely possible, on such an occasion, to avoid some allusion to the fact of George having been absent, and Charles and his wife both felt that, for once, they must give expression to that which weighed so heavily on their minds; and they did this with so much tenderness and affection that George, after attempting many trivial excuses, and forcing himself to laugh with but a poor pretense to mirth, at last broke down, confessing his weakness, and his real distress under it, but, at the same time, declaring his inability to do otherwise.

"I do believe," said Grace, "after all, that you are not well."

"Not well!" exclaimed George; and he did laugh heartily at last, as he showed Grace how tight his last coat had become already, assuring her, as indeed she had more than suspected before, that he was growing quite disgracefully stout.

"It does not follow from that," said Grace, "that you are in perfect health. I should say the contrary."

"By the way," said Charles, "what has become of



that horse of yours? I thought you were going to take horse exercise."

"Yes, the horse," added Grace; "where is it?"

"Sold," replied George, in rather a dismal tone.

"Sold!" exclaimed Charles. "Why, what was the matter with it?"

"There was nothing the matter with the horse," replied George, "that I am aware of. The matter is with me, and it is just this. You know we were never brought up to much riding, and Jane said I looked like a country tailor on horseback. She was always telling me I ought to have seen how her father held himself in the saddle, and that none but military gentlemen knew how to ride."

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Grace. "You did extremely well. But come, George, I'll give you a challenge. I was always used to riding as a girl, and I have been longing for it again, I can not tell you how much lately."

"What! with that baby to take care of?"

"Oh yes! the baby won't hinder me. I know of the most charming pony that I could have any day, and you shall buy another horse, and we will ride together every day."

"If you have been so accustomed to riding, I don't think you would like to be seen with a tailor-looking fellow like me, Grace."

"I should like to ride with you above all things, look as you may."

"You would have to teach me, and that would be too absurd."

"I should like that too."

"But the look of it—what would people think?"

"They would think you were teaching me, if, indeed, they thought any thing about us. But, George, why



should we be perpetually referring to other people's opinions about what we do? You and I have reasons for riding, and we *can* ride. Is not that enough? And now, Charles, you will see about Mr. Nicolson's pony this very day, won't you?"

"But the horse?" said George.

"I think I can suit you there, too," said Charles. "I know of a capital one for sale, if you will give the price for it."

"Oh! he does not mind the price," exclaimed Grace, in a state of great eagerness to have her project put in execution.

So the horse was bought, as well as the pony; and Grace rode out with her brother very often, and with much enjoyment, on her part, especially when, after two or three hints, she saw that he rode quite well enough for any gentleman not intending to hunt.

But neither Charles nor his wife, with all their kindness, and all their delicate and prudent consideration, was able to counteract the influence at home which still continued to operate in the same way, even in the merest trifles, as well as in matters of higher moment. As, for instance, in the case of a dog. George liked a dog to trot after his heels, and sometimes to amuse himself with in the house. But Jane could not endure dumb animals; and a dog in the room with her made her so nervous and uncomfortable, that one day, in a sudden fit of vexation, George gave orders for his dog to be killed, and never made the experiment of keeping a dog again.

As his child grew older, George would have found a source of almost unbounded happiness and merriment in its playful propensities, which soon bid fair to equal any thing which his own spirits as a boy had ever manifested. He never tossed him in the air, however, screaming with delight, but Jane, with a look of painful anxiety,



implored him to be more gentle. He never rolled him in the sofa cushions, but Jane entreated him not to spoil every thing in the room. He never talked gibberish, or made grimaces with him, but Jane wondered he should think it necessary to make a buffoon of himself for the entertainment of the child. Until one day, goaded beyond his patience, George almost threw the boy into his mother's lap, and retreating to a couch in a distant part of the room, exclaimed, in a tone of bitterness,—

“I think it is a pity that I have any existence at all, Jane. It would be better if I was entirely out of the world.”

Jane, who had no understanding whatever of the deep meaning of these words, spoken in that peculiar tone, took the child, and very carefully adjusted every fold of its dress, setting it upright on her lap, as she thought a child ought to sit; no idea being, at that moment, farther from her mind, than that of having done any mischief herself.

But there was mischief done, nevertheless, and that of a very serious kind too. So much so, that Grace said boldly to her husband one day—

“I do believe I must have a good talk with Jane. What you told me of that family at the Green has so filled my mind, that I can not rest about poor George. How do you think Jane will take it?”

“I don't think,” replied Charles, “she will take it at all, if you mean by that, receive it into her heart, so as to do her any good. I don't believe it possible to make her understand you. She wishes to be, and I dare say thinks herself, the best wife in the world. How is it likely she will either be convinced that she is not, or endure with patience any attack upon her faultless system?”

“I'll try,” said Grace; and true enough she went that



very day, knowing that Jane would be alone. But when she found her seated quietly in the midst of her proprieties, and when she had sat with her a little while, and nothing particular had transpired to lead the conversation in the way desired, Grace began to fear her task would be more difficult than she had anticipated; for how, she now asked herself, as her husband had asked her before, would it be possible to make Jane understand that she was not the best wife in the whole world?

It was an awkward business for Grace to undertake, because the very ground of all that she was about to complain of lay deep in the domestic secrets of the family, with which it might with reason be asserted that she had no right to interfere. But there was the strong impulse of tender and affectionate solicitude to urge her on; and again repeating to herself what might almost have been called the maxim of her life, "I must do the best I can, and leave the rest," Grace commenced her difficult enterprise by observing that Charles and she had been a good deal troubled about George lately, "thinking him perhaps not quite well, and certainly not like himself."

Jane looked astonished, and laughed a little, saying—

"Indeed, I don't think you would suspect him of not being well, if you knew how much stouter he is growing."

"That is one thing that troubles us," said Grace. "We think he wants more exercise—more work—to be called out more."

"I can not imagine what you mean," replied Jane; "I think he goes out quite as much as does him any good. You don't know how often he goes over to the Gibsons now—much oftener than he did until lately."

"I don't think the Gibsons likely to benefit him much, certainly," observed Grace.



And she was right in this, for they were a musical family, whose habits and modes of thought were as frivolous, and as different from those in which George had once found pleasure, as possible. But they were easy-going people, who liked his company, made much of him, and never gave him a "setting down," as George had said, when his brother asked him why he went there so often.

"I did not mean," said Grace, "that merely getting out from his own home would do George good—far from it. But you know he used to be a public man. He has great capabilities for public usefulness; and to be called out more in that line is what I think so good for him."

"Indeed, that public business tired him very much," said Jane, "and he often spoke badly, and vexed himself, and came home quite out of spirits. You have no idea how mortified, and vexed, and tired, he often was."

"I can quite understand that," said Grace. "But you know, Jane, whoever would do any thing great or good must run some risk; and what I mean particularly is, that George is a man who would be better with the risk, and the effort, and the useful occupation for his talents and energies, than with a life of ease and nothingness."

As Jane made no reply to this, Grace was encouraged to go on.

"I have sometimes thought," she said, "that we, as wives, owe a great duty to our husbands, besides taking care of them personally, and nursing them when ill. I think it rests a good deal with us whether we lift them up as men, or drag them down—whether we encourage them and help them to make the best of themselves as men, as patriots, and as Christians, or so use our influence to dishearten and keep them down, that they move



backward, rather than forward, in the ranks of human being."

It was evident that Jane did not understand in the least what Grace was talking about, so she had to try again.

"Charles," she said, "was telling me a sad story the other day about those people at the Green. I am sure I always thought them rather nice people. I should have said Mrs. Lambert was one of the best managers in the world. But it seems she had a way of always setting her husband down. Poor man! he told Charles in confidence one day that his wife had crushed the spirit out of him; that he never could do right in her eyes, when he tried his utmost; that he never, since the first day of their marriage, had received from her one word of encouragement; and so, as he never got any credit for doing right, he thought he might just as well do wrong; for though he said he did not want credit from the world, he did want something at home to keep his heart up a little. He told Charles, too, how all the little fancies and pleasures which he had once amused himself with, though innocent enough in themselves, had been denied him, or spoiled to him in one way or another; until at length, it seems, he took to the pleasures of the table, and then groveled down so low that many actual vices followed; and now he has gone off, nobody knows where, taking a girl who was once his servant away with him."

Jane might well look up with astonishment now, and she did so, with indignation too.

"You don't mean, I suppose," she replied with warmth, "that my husband is going off with his kitchen-maid?"

"Oh no, no!" exclaimed Grace, with equal warmth. "Don't misunderstand me. I never had such a thought."

"What do you mean, then?" asked Jane.

"I mean," replied Grace, "that men, however good



and great they may be, require a little humoring; that they can not, and will not, bear to be always crossed in little things; nor is it right that they should be tried in this way. In fact, I believe that the wife who would kindly, yet judiciously, humor her husband in little things, would almost always find him disposed to consult her wishes in great things. Besides, Jane, dear Jane, you must forgive me if I approach rather more closely than you like. I have been thinking a great deal about you lately; and recollecting that you lost your father while young, and never had a brother, I have thought perhaps you did not know so much about men when you married as many women do; and perhaps it never struck you that men have naturally, and generally, a large amount of self-love."

"Indeed," said Jane, "I think that is striking enough to the humblest capacity. But what of that?"

"Well, let them have their self-love, since God has given it to them, no doubt for some good purpose, if rightly used. We, you know, have our vanity. Let us call one self-esteem, and the other love of approbation; and then if, as the phrenologists tell us, men have more of the former, women of the latter, what can either do more wisely than to make the best we can of our natural tendencies?"

"I should like to know," said Jane, "how a man's self-love is to be made into any thing but rank selfishness, and I see no use in calling it by any better name."

"I think," replied Grace, "that we should only call it selfishness when it takes a mean and greedy form. But suppose we let that pass, and granting that men have by nature this peculiarity; what I want to say is, that instead of trying to cut it down or root it out, and thus perpetually wounding it, what if we should endeavor to help it into a right course, give it a right direction, and



keep it up to the highest mark? I believe that even the quality so offensive when allied to characters generally mean and low may be made of essential service in doing all the great work and the hard work which men are called to do in the world, and which they never could do effectually, if let down by a miserable opinion of themselves, and a degraded view of their own capabilities. Besides which, there is always this important consideration for a wife to bear in mind—no man who is not utterly servile continues long to love the woman who is always wounding his self-esteem. It is contrary to nature that he should—to *man's* nature I ought to say, for there are women who love in this way to their own cost. There is always danger to a wife, therefore, on this ground, because the wounds of a man's self-esteem are seldom if ever healed. Indeed, such is the peculiarity of man's nature in this respect, that if he has a fond heart, and must love something, there would be little to wonder at in his turning away from the most admirable and even beautiful woman who should be always wounding him here, to bestow his affections upon the meanest object, who should yet tenderly and constantly minister to his self-love. This is nature too, and we women ought all to know it, and to shape our course accordingly."

"You seem very learned on these subjects," observed Jane, after a short silence. "I really think you ought to publish such knowledge in a book. It is quite too valuable to be bestowed upon me alone."

"Jane, dear Jane," said Grace, "don't be vexed with me. I know that I am speaking to you in a manner which I hate myself, and should, perhaps, hate still more if any one spoke to me in the same way. If, as you say so scornfully, I really have some knowledge of this kind, I owe it all to a wise, good mother, who used to make



her daughters her friends; and as she thought, perhaps, we should some time be wives and mothers ourselves, used to talk with us on all such matters in the way that I wish, from my heart, all mothers would talk, instead of leaving their daughters to marry in the dark, each afterward finding out her own way, and many missing the right way altogether.

“But I have not done even yet, Jane. There are a few more words I must say, for they are very important. All that I have already said might belong to a system, a mode of management, than which there is nothing more disliked by men. Now, it seems to me that God has given us all an instinct of affection to supply what is wanted, without system, and without management at all; and that this instinct makes us shrink from the bare idea of wounding a good and noble man on the points alluded to. A conceited man, or a man seeking only his own ends, is quite a different matter. Happily for us, neither you nor I have any thing to do with such a case; and all I have farther to say—for I am afraid that I have already said too much—is, that if a man has reason to suspect that his wife is losing her respect for him, especially if her manner, on occasions when he feels most sensitive, evinces any thing like contempt, he never can be made to believe that she loves him; while, on the other hand, if this tender instinct, so peculiarly woman’s gift, is always employed to build him up on all such points, strengthening his self-confidence when about to fail, healing his self-love when wounded, and ministering to his self-esteem when most wanted for prompt and vigorous action, he will then repose with implicit confidence in the affection of his wife; because he will believe that it is founded upon esteem, approval, and even admiration of himself.

“And now, Jane, that I have preached my little ser-



mon, will you let us try together to build up your good husband, so as to help him to be all that is good, and useful, and great, which he is capable of being?"

"I do the best I can for him," said Jane. "I don't know what right you or any one has to charge me with doing less. I think if every woman does the best she can for her *own* husband she does *her* duty, and had better be satisfied with that. I am sure the last thing I should think of in the world would be to meddle out of my own family."

"I fear you are deeply offended with me, Jane."

"Oh dear, no! I am not in the least offended. I dare say your intentions were good."

"Well, Jane, don't let enmity come between us, for the sake of our husbands. Good-by; and, depend upon it, I will never offend by talking to you in this way again. I can not bear that you should shun me under the idea that I shall be always interfering with your domestic affairs. Indeed, indeed, I never will again, Jane. Say that you trust me in this, or I can not leave you."

Jane did concede so much as to express her trust in this assurance; and so the two sisters parted, never to be united as sisters again, only as the mere associates of circumstance, thrown together by accident, not choice.

Some women in Jane's situation would have been resentful. Jane was not. But she was distant and cold, to a degree which pained her warm-hearted sister more than anger would have done. Charles endeavored to console his wife with assurances that this painful impression would wear out in time; and they both felt that the only way left open to them was to take no notice of the present, nor to make any allusion to the past.

But, alas! there was no good done. George Milbank grew very stout and very indolent. The last occasion on which he and his brother held any communication on



subjects once so familiar to them both, was when Charles one day expressed his surprise that he had not for two or three Sundays seen his brother at the chapel which they had always been accustomed to attend.

George laughed. He did not want to treat the matter seriously.

“You see,” he said, “the singing annoyed Jane, and I can not let her go to church alone. You know the singing *is* execrable, Charles.”

“I know,” said Charles, “it is the kind of singing you and I, George, have been used to from our cradles; and it’s rather late in the day for you to find out how bad it is now.”

“Well,” said George, “I believe Jane bore it as long as she could; for you know there was an agreement between us, before we married, that she should always go with me to chapel in the morning, and that I should go to church with her in the after part of the day. But what with the child, and one thing or another, she never gets out in the evening now; and she has felt it hard being debarred altogether from going to her own place, especially with such a service and such singing as you have there. So, you see—”

“Yes, I see,” said Charles. “You need not be at any more trouble to explain.”

And the brothers from this time said very little more to each other on subjects of this nature. They each went their separate way through life, Charles rising gradually in general esteem and influence, while his powers of usefulness extended far and wide among his fellow-men. In all points of personal attachment, or of kindly intercourse, the brothers remained the same to each other. Nothing could have alienated or set them at variance with each other.

With regard to his political relations, George gave



them up altogether; and if attending the service at the parish church once every Sunday with his wife might be considered as constituting him a member of that establishment, George certainly was so, especially as he never, unless on one or two special occasions, went into a Dissenting place of worship again. If, therefore, one party in religion and politics lost an active, able, and efficient supporter, the other gained a very quiet member, by which, many would say—what we are not going to dispute—that society was a gainer. All that we are concerned with is the man himself; and the question remains—did *he* lose or gain, as a man, by the system pursued in his matrimonial experience?



# THE SECRET.

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## CHAPTER I.

WHEN Jessie Williams left school, at the age of seventeen, she took home with her the highest testimonials of merit. It was a high-pressure school which she left under these favorable circumstances—a school in which emulation was the sole motive power; and in Jessie's case this power had been applied with wonderful success. It was, in fact, *the* power by which she was always most quickly and most effectually moved. To stand first, to gain the highest prize, to be more praised and more thought of than the other girls—this it was which kept Jessie alive; this kept her at work early and late; this made her quick to answer, keen to find out, and, in fact, all which her fond parents and ambitious teachers desired that she should be.

To look at Jessie you would never have guessed that she was a scholar. No more she was in the strict sense of the word. Scholar indeed! The other girls, her companions, knew very well how little she cared for scholarship; but then she did care for being first; she did care for distancing Miss Jones, who held her head so high; she did care for snatching the prize out of the grasp of Miss Smith, who was said to be so clever; she did care when the professor singled her out as being the first young lady in the school; she did care when she heard her name pronounced with pride by the lady of the establishment, and when she read, in the servile submission of the junior pupils, that there was awarded to her that



peculiar rank and distinction which all the other girls would have been delighted to attain, but could not.

So Jessie Williams was sent home, supposed by all parties to be a fine specimen of what schools can do, and what, in fact, it is their express business and duty to do. The fault—but why should we speak of any fault, when the whole world is on the side of Jessie Williams and her school; when wise men and good women—when the highest authorities in the land call this education, and refuse to believe in education which does not aim directly and exclusively at this? Yet we were going to say modestly, and with all deference, that if there were the least shadow of a fault in Jessie's actual condition on leaving school, it ought not to be charged altogether upon the system, but rather upon the parents who uphold this system, and so pay for it most liberally, believing it to be the best.

But what did Jessie look like, if not like a scholar? She looked as handsome and as pleasure-loving a creature as could well be found. We will not be betrayed, even by the love of her bright looks, into a minute description of her beauty, only so far as to prove, that if a scholar, she was no ascetic, nor could very conveniently have been one under any circumstances. The style of Jessie's beauty was as follows—a somewhat dark, but clear complexion, with that peculiar glow in her finely-rounded cheeks which this kind of complexion alone can boast; thick wavy folds of shining hair, in some lights glossy black, in others tinged with auburn, and eyes to match; a mouth somewhat larger than the Grecian, yet with such rosy lips and pearly teeth, that the most fastidious critic could not have found fault with its dimensions. Add to this a well-proportioned figure, about the average height, with just a little tendency, at this time of her life, to be too stout, and you may picture Jessie



Williams, though even then you will want her merry laugh, her frank expression, and her flashing eye, with all the little artful turns of look and movement in which she was a great proficient, even at the age of seventeen.

Now, whether such a physical structure as Jessie's did not indicate the desirableness of a little care, a little training on the *womanly* side of the educational question, is a matter of grave importance, not however, to be discussed here. Our business here is merely to tell how Jessie carried herself, and what she met with in the new, but real life upon which she had just entered.

At first Jessie felt surprised to find her school acquirements of such extremely little value in helping her to gain the position which she liked best, and was determined, if possible, to have—the *first*, always the first. Naturally she stood first with her parents, for she was their only child; but to be first in society she soon found it was not at all necessary to bring forward any of those valuable acquisitions which she had gained at school—rather to keep them back; and as for the gentlemen with whom she met, Jessie soon found that extremely little scholarship did for them.

Jessie had been a quick learner at school—she was not a slow one now. The lesson of life, as she regarded it, was, in fact, much more suited to her taste than any school lesson had ever been. The science to which her attention was directed now was to look well, to dress well, to visit, to dance, and to flirt as occasion might offer. Jessie was soon at the top of her class, above the heads of all her acquaintances here; and it was so pleasant too, so entertaining, so perfectly congenial to her nature—that nature which had never been cultivated—never even dreamed of at school, that life began to wear an aspect more enchanting than she had ever anticipated. She had grown up to the age of seventeen more and



more handsome, and saucy, and vain; and no one had ever thought about the *woman*, because, as the pupil, she did her tasks so well, answering all the stated questions, and maintaining her position as first in her class. So now the woman had come to mix with other women—yes, and with men also, as little prepared for the real business of woman's life as on the day when she first left the arms of her nurse, to be trusted alone upon the nursery floor.

But there was no great harm in Jessie after all. She was not false, nor mean, nor vindictive; hardly capable of malignant feeling, unless where her vanity was concerned. She was generous to excess, and, where her pity was awakened, would sometimes do a kind action, provided only it did not tire nor trouble her, nor soil her gloves. She was so much accustomed, however, to carry things her own way, that she not unfrequently ordered kindnesses to be done when not disposed to do them herself. She could be charitable by proxy, and so relieved her feelings, without incurring either trouble or inconvenience. People thought her very good-tempered—she took life so easily, and had such a beaming, happy face. They should have seen the flash of her dark eye when there was a chance, even the remotest, of a rival stepping before her.

Of course Jessie had many admirers among the gentlemen, and she spared none who fell in her way. Hearts, so far as she had heard or conceived of such things, were only curious toys to her, until, at last, the amusement of playing with them began to pall; and, in her gravest moods, she became conscious of a secret wish that there was something more earnest to be done than she was doing—some real heart to win, perhaps, or lose—something, in short, that would interest her more than mere flirtation.



The sphere in which Jessie moved was confined to the middle class of society, so there was no very distinguished conquest to be made. A lawyer's clerk was her first admirer—an exceedingly small curate the next—a well-to-do manufacturer of more than mature age the third; and so on, with many others of the same grade in society, none of whom, however, afforded the slightest interest of a romantic nature. Nor, indeed, did actual offers of marriage arise out of all these conquests. Jessie had a skillful way of warding off any serious consequences, and marriage was far from being the result at present contemplated. She liked the conquest, and to have it seen that she had conquered; but as to any heart affair, on her side at least, she was yet as “fancy free” as if the language of affection had never fallen in her ear.

So things went on for a year or two after Jessie's school days were over. There is no sovereignty much more absolute than that of a young beauty who rules, and smiles, and dispenses frowns or favors, as the whim may be, within the narrow boundary of country life; for though Jessie's home was in a town, or rather the outskirts of one, there was, among her acquaintances, as small a range of intercourse with the great world lying beyond as if they had been occupants of the most retired country village. Hence it was that Jessie grew a little tired of her uneventful life, and longed for other worlds to conquer beyond her own. It is just possible that Jessie was not particularly happy in herself all this while. At all events she was tired, and wanted something new. She said she would begin to study again, but she never set about it. She turned her attention to music again, but it was only because a girl of her acquaintance played better than she did. She took lessons in drawing, but it was only because an interesting Italian emigrant had



come into the neighborhood to teach it. Thus Jessie went on, with all the glow and flush of healthy life about her, kindling her blood, animating her movements, and flashing in her eye, yet with no earthly purpose that she knew of to fulfill beyond pleasing herself for the passing moment.

Jessie had an uncle residing in one of the midland counties, to whom she had paid a visit on first leaving school, and about this time she was invited to go again. It was a change, and so far pleasant. The place at which this gentleman resided was only a genteel little inland town, and consequently one of the dullest imaginable. Still there was some society in the neighborhood, and almost any variety looked more attractive to Jessie than the wearisome monotony of her present life, for as yet she was profoundly ignorant of the cause of her weariness. She thought the fault was in the people around her. She never suspected it to be in herself; and, being there, was the best blessing God could send her in her present circumstances, because it was necessary that she should become either tired of herself, or disgusted or miserable, before she would be likely to set about in earnest to be any thing better. Poor Jessie! she had a good deal to suffer yet, before learning this lesson. But we shall see.

Jessie's uncle was a married man, with children a good deal younger than their handsome cousin; and her coming created quite a sensation among them, as well as in the quiet neighborhood around, where every event occurring in a family was talked over by all the others with the greatest minuteness, though, at the same time, with every possible variety of comment, and, of course, with a considerable amount of distortion. Thus the arrival of Miss Williams was a circumstance of no small importance, and her dress, her looks, her manners, but



especially her admirers, soon became the almost universal theme among the women; while the men found other topics of interest to dwell upon, not less closely connected with the lovely and captivating stranger.

Here, indeed, was amusement sufficient, even for Jessie, for a while; but here also life began to tire. What could be the reason? She was young and healthy; and free from trouble in mind, body, or estate. She could have any thing she desired within the bounds of moderation; for her parents were in easy circumstances, and always indulged her to excess. She had looked forward to this change with pleasant and excited feelings; yet here the people were as stupid as those she had left, and the place even less interesting than her home. One thing only piqued her, and so added zest to the admiration she commanded; it was the envy of most of the girls about her own age. This she was equally quick to perceive, and willing to be amused with, though still sufficiently good-natured to try to conciliate wherever it was in her power to do so without any sacrifice to herself. Even then the girls said her manner toward them had something condescending in it, as if she pitied them for being less admired than herself; and that kind of conciliation they did not thank her for. No, indeed! And they tossed their pretty heads, and thought they many of them looked as well as Jessie—only, somehow, the men did not seem to think so.

## CHAPTER II.

PURSUING his quiet avocations, mostly of a scientific nature, there lived in the little town of Larchfield a Dr. Thompson, a man much esteemed in the neighborhood, though, perhaps, less talked about than any other individual there. He mixed but little in the society of the



place; paid little attention to women—at least to young women; and, for the most part, kept himself separate from the gossip, the small talk, the fuss and the ferment of those rivalries and cabals in which such a place is sure to abound. Still no man was better known than the doctor, though in a very different capacity from that of an idle visitor; for wherever there was illness, or accident, or trouble of almost any description, he was sure to be there—nurse as well as doctor beside the sick, and comforter as well as physician where any family affliction, or other cause of distress, rendered the presence of such a friend acceptable.

Dr. Thompson, though a bachelor, was still young enough to have been joked about, as most unmarried men are; only that it seemed impossible, in his case, to hang upon him even the shreds of a flirtation. He was clear of all suspicion of having, or of aiming at any thing in the shape of an *affair*, if ever man was in this world. Idle, vain, and flirting women could make nothing of him; so he was allowed to pass quietly on, devoting his tenderest solicitude to their grandmothers. Only if they fell ill, then, indeed, they did like to have him near them; then his coming was a pleasant hope for the morrow, so soon as the door had closed upon his departing steps; while his advice, which he sometimes ventured on such occasions to extend a little beyond the mere concerns of the body, was remembered by many long after they had escaped from the sick-room. Often did they wish to have his kind, his delicate, but yet most truthful words repeated. But no. When they took their places in the ball-room again, or even in the accustomed routine of gay and idle life, the doctor was gone—far off as before; and neither their brilliant glances nor their captivating smiles could win him back. They had a right, he said, to go their way, as he went his. He had no quarrel



with any one whose way lay in a different direction from his own. It was remarkable, on all occasions, how he bore with human frailty and even sin, without fault-finding or direct condemnation. And yet to lead such a life as he did, his housekeeper said, might have justified him in finding fault with half the world, and condemning the other half. She knew she would, if she stood as clear as him.

A few things, however, Dr. Thompson did find fault with; but they were *things*, not persons. One was the building of houses closely huddled together without back doors, the patching up of cheap wretched tenements for the sake of a small weekly rent, and the waste of health and property, with the corruption of morals, which this scandalous abuse of means is sure to produce. Then, again, the poor themselves tried his patience sorely. He wanted to open their windows for them, to show them how to cook, and to make a totally different arrangement of their beds and sleeping-rooms. He knew he could make them a thousand times more comfortable, saving money all the while; and he did sometimes quarrel with them so far as to use sharp words, when they returned to their old ways after the door had been closed upon his back. But he never said to any one among them—not even to old drunken Phœbe, who swore at him; nor to James Baker, who was had up for stealing the week after he had begged him off; nor to poor Polly Simpkins, who went astray—he never said to any of these, “I am holier than thou;” so they bore with every thing he did say, even when it touched them most closely; and never, in their sober moments, did he hear from them an unkind or disrespectful word.

Jessie Williams had not been many weeks a visitor in Larchfield before almost every thing possible or impossible had been spoken or suggested about her. The



most impossible was that she could ever succeed in playing off what they were pleased to call her *tricks* upon the doctor. Almost every one said positively the thing could not be. Some said she would never dare to make the attempt; but there were a few who shook their heads, and one or two who said they would give a good deal to see the experiment fairly tried. At last these comments became so frequent, the pros and cons of this important topic so rife, that Jessie herself could not fail to be aware of what was being talked about; and the consequence was, she planned within her own mind that the experiment should be made if ever she had the chance. She was determined, however, to make it so covertly, that no one would be able to triumph over her defeat, should that, indeed, be the result.

The bets which were made upon this interesting question, as well as Jessie's secret project, seemed, however, but little likely to arrive at any decision; for, as already said, Dr. Thompson seldom if ever joined the evening parties of Larchfield. They would have been the most irksome waste of time to him, scarcely to be endured with any decent show of patience. So how were he and Jessie ever to meet? It is true she saw him every Sunday at church; but it seemed equally true that he never saw her, for he was not in the habit of appearing to look about him, though he managed in some way to see as much as most men.

Jessie did not at all admire Dr. Thompson when she saw him first. He looked old, she thought, and care-worn, and so awfully grave. She would have to become a sister of charity, she thought, or to keep a dame school; or, at all events, to go about distributing tracts, in order to gain his attention at all. The case looked very difficult, and her success much more questionable than she had at first supposed.



Dr. Thompson was not quite so old as he appeared. Thirty-five years was the extent of his attainment in the way of age, but experience had carried him far beyond that period. And already there were silvery hairs about his temples, and lines across his forehead which told of deep thought, and perhaps deep feeling too, though not of the ordinary kind, nor such as could easily be expressed in common language. No one, in fact, ever heard him talk about his own feelings, his own history, associations, or belongings. He might have dropped from the moon for any thing he disclosed on these points himself. The direction of his letters, both coming and going, was carefully examined at the post-office, but nothing came of that; and failing equally in every other system of investigation, the little town of Larchfield had at last fairly given the matter up, turning its enlightened attention to other fields of interest, at once more easy of cultivation and more fruitful.

It was hard to let such a man entirely alone; but they did at last, and had done so for a long time, until now this curious notion about Jessie Williams set them all talking again; and the doctor was watched, and followed, and peeped at, and whispered about, in a way that would have driven him distracted had he known. But while they whispered loud enough for Jessie to hear and understand, not one of the whisperers would have dared to let the doctor hear, or even surmise, what they were busying themselves about. And so, while the little town was rife with this folly, the grave doctor sat in his surgery, very carefully putting together the fossil bones of a strange animal that was occupying his whole attention, except when engaged in the more urgent duties of his profession.

Now, if only Jessie could have flashed upon him with her splendid eyes while thus employed—if she could



have stood between him and his old bony monster, laughing as she did laugh sometimes—if she could have cut her finger with his sharp-edged tools, and cried a little, and got him to bind it up—this would have been something. But Jessie was a modest girl, with all her coquetry—modest and maidenly at heart; and the doctor looked to her the very last man upon earth on whose privacy she would have intruded, or whose scruples she would have shocked.

The old adage goes far beyond the truth in asserting that “where there’s a will there always is a way.” There is sometimes a very strong and earnest will, and no way at all. But this was not exactly Jessie’s case, for a way occurred to her which she herself would never have thought of, and still less desired.

Jessie sprained her ankle. A very delicate and beautifully-rounded ankle it was; but in its swollen and discolored state, so intolerably painful, that Jessie cared no more who bound it up, or who bathed it with lotion, than if there had been no choice of human beings whatever in the world.

Some persons, it is said, do actually feel more pain than others from the same cause. Most certainly Jessie was one who either felt it very much, or had very little command over her own feelings; for she not only dreaded pain, but hated it, and threw herself into strange passions of anger and grief when she had to endure it, as if a sort of wrong had been inflicted along with the suffering. This might in part arise from the extreme rarity of the sensation of pain in her case. A cut finger, the sting of a bee, and once a fit of earache, were about the worst physical calamities that Jessie had ever known; and they were each spoken of with horror, as if most terrible to endure.

*Now* Jessie was really in pain—there could be no



doubt about that, for the sprain was a very severe one; and though the identical Dr. Thompson, of whom she had thought so much, now sat beside her, endeavoring to soothe her irritation both of body and mind, she appeared wholly insensible to his presence. Nay, she even attempted, once or twice, to push him away when he approached her foot; and frowned, and pouted, and cried, behaving altogether as disagreeably as she could, very much like a spoiled child—for such, indeed, she was—wholly absorbed in her own sensations.

“Cousin Jane has done for herself now,” said one of the daughters of the family, when she came down to her mother, after peeping into the room, and hearing her cousin alternately scolding and crying. “The doctor will scold her finely, won’t he, mamma?”

“She certainly deserves it,” said the mother. “But the doctor is very kind.”

“I know he scolded me,” said the girl, “when I cried about my tooth; and you can not think how Cousin Jessie is going on.”

“She is very foolish, my dear. I hope you will learn a lesson, and never be like her.”

“I wish I was like her.”

“Why?”

“Because every one admires her so, and she is so very, very pretty.”

“I think the doctor won’t admire her much, unless she can conduct herself a little more reasonably.”

“No, certainly; but the doctor is so strict. Don’t you think him so, mamma?”

“I think he is one of the last persons I should like to see me behave foolishly.”

And thus the mother and child went on chatting together, picturing to themselves and to one another, with what annoyed and angry looks the doctor would come



down stairs, and how low Cousin Jessie would sink in his esteem; when, to their great astonishment, down came the doctor, looking rather more pleased than usual. It is true he could not speak of his patient without a little quiet sort of laugh, which they might construe into contempt if they liked. But he gave as many orders to be attended to as if the case was one of life or death; and even suggested some means for quieting the mind of the patient, which the lady of the house considered wholly unnecessary, and nothing less than absurd.

The fact was, the doctor had been much more entertained than annoyed. There was not a turn, nor movement, nor absolute distortion in the whole of Jessie's frame which had rendered her otherwise than perfectly beautiful to him; and, as such, how could she really vex him? for he was human, and a man. Partly out of pity for her present sufferings, and partly as he thought from curiosity, he felt that he should like to see how she would look when perfectly at rest. And so he labored with more than common assiduity to bring about this interesting result. But it was strange for a good man, as he was, how little he thought about the want of patience or fortitude in his patient, the want of gratitude, or, indeed, the want of many other virtues which ought to have been much more conspicuous than they were.

No; Jessie was a charming picture—a fine study even for an anatomist; and it is questionable whether the doctor enjoyed putting together his old bones quite as much as before the accident. At all events, he was often in attendance upon his patient; and by degrees, as Jessie's pain abated, she became sensible of what a pitiful spectacle she must have been making of herself in the eyes of the very man whose admiration she had previously been so determined to command.

Dr. Thompson was altogether a very different person



from what Jessie had imagined him. At least, he was different to her; for now he was sometimes both animated and jocose, and very pleasantly he seemed to be amusing himself in her society, now diversifying his professional discourse with a little raillery, and then with a little plain-speaking, or even fault-finding, just as middle-aged gentlemen will often amuse themselves with girls of ten or twelve years old. But all the while a sagacious observer might have seen that a strong under current of tenderness, and even interest, was suggesting a greater number of remedies than ever were tried upon a sprained ankle before, with an amount of ingenious care-taking quite out of proportion to the requirements of the case.

The family did not like this, of course. They thought the doctor was doing all he could farther to spoil one who had all her life been a great deal too much indulged. Sometimes they thought he surely must be making game of his patient, in order to convince her more clearly in the end how foolish she had been; while at other times they thought the doctor—their wise doctor—must absolutely have lost his senses, so totally different was his treatment of this case, in its moral aspect, from any thing they could have anticipated.

“Really, my dear,” said the lady of the house to her husband one night, “I do begin to think this nonsense about Jessie and the doctor will come to some conclusion, such as I never should have thought possible.”

“What conclusion do you mean?”

“I mean that he will fall in love with her.”

“Nonsense indeed! You women are always conjuring up some absurdity of that kind.”

“Well, we shall see. I should have said at one time it was absurd; but what do you think he has ordered for her now?”



"I don't know, and I don't care. If a man likes to make a fool of himself, let him. If he likes to marry her even—"

"Marry her! Why, that would be madness in them both. They have not a single idea in common."

"And what of that? People don't marry for ideas. You don't know but they will make the happiest couple in Larchfield some day."

"I think I do, though. If I know any thing, I know that such a marriage could bring nothing but misery to both."

"I can only answer in your own words—we shall see. But, for the present, do let me sleep. The doctor is a good man, and sensible. He might possibly make something out of Jessie after all."

"Never!" said the wife, a little piqued at her husband's want of interest in so momentous a subject, and so trying to console herself with the last word before she also slept; and well was it for her husband that one word sufficed for this amiable purpose. That was easily conceded, and the gentleman was soon oblivious; but the lady pondered a little longer upon the strange contradictions incident to human nature, and to the nature of man in particular.

With regard to the gossip of the place, as it related to Jessie and the doctor, the aunt had entirely held herself aloof, not choosing, from motives of delicacy, to appear to understand what was talked about, and feeling, besides, a little scandalized at its extreme folly. Now she began to think how deeply she herself and her family would be implicated in this absurdity, should it assume any definite character, quite forgetting, as women are apt to do when a very pretty girl becomes the choice of a very wise man, that the match, if it suits the parties most concerned, has no right, on the simple ground of its inequality, to vex any one else.



When Jessie Williams came down again, and joined the circle of her uncle's family, she appeared to all the household altered somewhat for the better; very much pleased with herself, it is true, but yet more pleased with others than she had seemed before, and a little—just a little grateful for what was done for her. She spoke but seldom of the doctor now, yet always so managed as to be in a little back sitting-room at the time of his call. And it was observed, too, that these calls were more frequent and more prolonged than the case of a sprained ankle, now so near recovery, could possibly require.

At last the truth came out—strange truth!—and most exciting to the inhabitants of Larchfield, both old and young. Dr. Thompson was the accepted lover of his late patient, and Jessie was going home to prepare for her marriage.

### CHAPTER III.

WAS ever couple launched upon the sea of life with so little probability of steering the same way? Ah! but the wise ones say the gentleman must steer. Only think how much older he is—how much more experienced! What a child the wife is compared with him, and how ignorant of the world!

Ignorant indeed! Jessie did not care to know any thing now but that her husband loved her. She asked no questions about his family relations, parentage, or previous life. Her father had made all due inquiries respecting the character, position, and professional income of the doctor in the town of Larchfield—that was enough; for he had lived there many years, and nothing could be more satisfactory than the answers received. So the marriage had taken place with entire approbation



on the part of all Jessie's home connections, and with the most implicit belief in a future of perfect happiness on her own.

Among the relations who attended the celebration of this auspicious event, and who of course discussed the subject in all its phases, was a little maiden aunt of Jessie's from Bath, who, somehow or other, in talking these matters over, got the name of Thompson upon her tongue, and would not let it rest.

It was such a common name, they all told her—why need she perplex herself about it?

“Well, that might be,” said the lady; but still her maid Rebecca had an uncle—

Here the good woman was usually silenced, no one caring to hear more; nor, indeed, was she herself particularly clear as to what Rebecca's uncle could tell of a young man of the name of Thompson, once living as an assistant with a medical gentleman in the city of Bath. So the little lady went on without exciting the slightest interest in any of her hearers, repeating the name of “Thompson—Thompson” with a frequent “Dear me!” as if the tail of what she was trying to catch had just slipped out of her fingers. And nobody thought any thing more about what she might have to say, even if the lost hold should ever be recovered, so absorbed were all in the marriage itself, and in the “strangeness of it,” as all said who knew the parties best.

The housekeeper, who had served Dr. Thompson long and faithfully, thought it strange indeed when a beautiful young creature came and took the keys out of her hands, and then left them about, one here and another there, as if locks were of no value. She thought it strange when this same beautiful creature rushed into the doctor's private room without once knocking at the door, as she did twenty times a day, and met with no re-



buke. She thought it strange when the doctor left off his "conjuring," as she called it, let out his study fire with all those little earthen pots about it, which nobody might touch, and thrust his dry bones into a drawer, and went out into the garden with this young creature to eat cherries, actually climbing into a tree to gather them for her. Indeed, it seemed to her, the housekeeper said, while she went from room to room tidying up after the young lady, as if the world was turning all upside down; and she wondered, for her part, what would come next.

That quiet honeymoon, spent chiefly in their own home—that honeymoon upon which the old woman looked so querulously, was a very happy one to the parties most concerned. But we refrain, purposely and on principle, from describing more of married life than lies, as it were, on the surface, to be seen or heard by any who may happen to be present. Beyond this we have no business and no wish to penetrate; and, consequently, much of that interchange of affection which constitutes the true solace of married life must be imagined. Only it is necessary, for the progress of this story, to understand how these two individuals, embarking in the most serious affairs of life together, thought it quite sufficient that each loved the other, without making any reference to principles, or even habits, so far as to judge how each might be affected by the other's peculiarities of character for the future.

That the young bride should not do this was perfectly natural. She had married a man reputed to be wise and good, who loved her most devotedly; and for the rest she trusted every thing to him. But that a man of more than mature age—a man of observation, reflection, and experience—that *he* should do this! Well, perhaps that was natural too. For, after all, Jessie was not only beautiful, but a good deal more than that, if she had only



known it; and where her best feelings were called into play—or rather, we ought to say, her worst kept down, for she had not come to her best yet—she was by no means an uninteresting companion, and could make herself as pleasant and as winning as she was handsome.

In fact, the marriage of Jessie and the doctor was essentially a love match, if ever there was one. They had actually *fallen in love* with each other, a thing so out of date in the present day that it seems like going back to Noah, and his sons, and his sons' wives, to speak of it. Yet so far as ignoring all else—asking no questions—looking neither backward nor forward—living only for the present moment, and resolving all questions into the one supreme consideration, “Am I loved as I am loving?”—so far as this went, the happy couple might indeed be said to have entered into this indissoluble union under that auspicious combination of circumstances which used formerly to be called falling in love; and for some time it would have been difficult to say which of the two was most absorbed in the present, or which felt the smallest amount of apprehension about what might lie beyond.

From this pleasant dream the husband was, of course, the first to awake; not that he had less affection, but a higher sense of duty than his wife. There came a season of trying sickness in the place where they lived. An unusually wet autumn, attended with a distressing epidemic, was followed by a hard winter, and great suffering among the poor. So the doctor had need to rouse himself, and he did so with all his wonted energy and consideration. On him had hitherto devolved the organization of public charities, with the most onerous part of all those social regulations which such seasons of distress require, in order to keep the rich sufficiently alive to the claims of their suffering and needy neighbors.



It would be worse than useless to enter again into the small gossip of the little town of Larchfield, or to attempt to gather up into any moderate compass the variety of opinions, surmises, and conclusions, arising out of the doctor's marriage. Like any other nine days' wonder, however, even that passed away from its place of prominence in public opinion—driven out by the circumstance already described in that visitation of sickness, which called almost every one to some point of interest or some sphere of duty nearer home. The only necessity for alluding to this gossip at all was to show how this one influence, among many others, operated, in all probability, upon the doctor's character, so as to make him the man he was—open to hear all that his neighbors might choose to tell him, and to help them where he could, but never by any act of his own, not even by casual inadvertence, laying his own personal affairs open to their inspection.

So long, indeed, had this habit of the doctor's been practiced toward his neighbors, that it had become a kind of second nature; and had he married a woman of even ordinary curiosity, he would have been compelled to turn over a new leaf altogether, or to exercise a degree of authority in guarding his own affairs which might not have been altogether conducive to domestic harmony. As it was, although Jessie seemed to consider herself free to come and go wherever her husband might be, yet she went about in so unobservant a manner, her eyes so entirely closed to every thing beyond herself and him, and the measure or the manner of his affection for her, that it was no more intrusion to the doctor when his handsome young wife came and stood beside him, leaning over the back of his chair, or sometimes even snatching the pen out of his hand in order to claim his undivided attention, than it was for his favor-



ite dog to come and lie down at his feet, or his old privileged cat to purr on the table beside him.

It was most satisfactory to the doctor that Jessie never asked questions, nor troubled herself in any way about his affairs, so long as he was often near her, and petted and praised her as if she could never do wrong. That which the doctor had most dreaded in the married state was a meddling, inquisitive wife. For all the more serious and important purposes of life he was sufficient to himself. No woman, he thought, could help *him*. He never asked himself that other question—whether he could help a woman? He could love her! What could she possibly want more?

So when the great epidemic came, and the doctor had to bestir himself, often being out both night and day, and only coming home for a little hasty refreshment, Jessie began to feel the vacant hours hanging rather heavily upon her hands, and had enough to do to keep tolerably cheerful. Indeed, her husband, when he did come, not unfrequently found her in tears. Jessie could weep easily, and without the slightest disfigurement—a great charm in women; so he had only to kiss off the tears, which he did very readily, and praise her beauty, until she smiled again. And then he was gone, and she was consoled for a little while.

Once being roused into his former activity, and entering again into all the excitement of practical and efficient work, which the doctor loved so well, he did not feel quite disposed to fall back into the indolence and, as it seemed to him now, the worthlessness of his previous state. It is not an easy thing to change altogether the habits and tastes of a man of the doctor's age. He had, it is true, slipped aside for a happy moment from the great high road of life, to loiter, and gather flowers, and listen to the woodland songs; but the battle and the stir



of life were for him, and he sprang back again to his old duties with as much interest as some men spring from duty to enjoyment.

Thus when the sickness had abated, when the gloomy winter was giving place to spring, and the poor were finding work, and all things were returning to their accustomed condition of moderate comfort and prosperity—even then, when that happy period arrived, to which Jessie looked forward as to the time that would restore her husband to her, she found him so often engaged in business belonging to the town, as well as in his own scientific pursuits, which he now resumed with great avidity, that her married lot looked a good deal changed since first she entered upon its peaceful enjoyments. And she began to wonder each day at the strange sadness which haunted her like a spectre, taking its place opposite to her at table when her husband was away, sitting up with her at night when she waited for his return, and, worse than all, lying down with her in her husband's vacant place when she cried herself to sleep without him.

It was plain that Jessie ought never to have been a doctor's wife—not to mention Dr. Thompson in particular. She had no pursuits—she had never cared for any, only as they procured for her something that she wanted. Her reading was scarcely of a kind to occupy her thoughts, for even in this occupation she scarcely ever lost her self-consciousness. That was an ever-present companion, which no experience through which she had yet passed had enabled her to leave behind.

Alas! for those who marry for love alone, without any other aim, intellectual, or even ordinarily social. Jessie had never learned to take an interest in what her husband thought or did—only in himself. She scarcely cared to ask, and so he never told her, what occupied



him, and kept him away from her. Still less did he speak to her about the objects of scientific investigation on which his heart was set, and respecting which he cherished the exulting hope that he was about to make some grand discovery, not unlikely to result in lasting benefit to mankind. On all these points he was silent to his wife, or only touched upon them in a casual manner, as things in no way concerning her. He did not even tell her of the poor whom he visited, nor try to get her out on errands of kindness among her suffering neighbors. He would not have her name on any committee of usefulness. He thought he knew her too well to suppose she could possibly be in her place there; and he laughed to himself when he pictured his beautiful Jessie so circumstanced. Besides which, he did not want her ever to be absent when he came home, still less roaming about the streets and lanes by herself. She was too young and too handsome, he thought, for that. No, no; he must try to be more at home himself, and so bring back her smiles and roses; for Jessie was beginning to look a little less healthy and robust than formerly, partly, no doubt, from want of occupation and exercise, and partly from fretting so much when she was left alone.

Could any thing have been devised for the young wife actually to do, many of these sad feelings would have been spared her. But the old housekeeper was very clever, and knew all about what was wanted. Besides, Jessie had no taste for housekeeping, and hers was exactly that physical condition which, when not compelled to exertion, sinks into absolute indolence. And indolent indeed she was—moody, moping, almost miserable.

Mere sensation, the pleasure or the pain of the moment, had so much weight with Jessie, that for some time she had scarcely reflected on the position she was placed in



at all. She only *felt* its loneliness, and cried like a child because the only being she cared for in the world did not come when she wished for him. After a while, however, Jessie did begin to think, for she was no natural fool, though, without doubt, far enough from being wise; and the tenor of her thoughts ran thus:

“I am nothing but a plaything to him, after all. He amuses himself with me, but he lives with other people. He has a world for the exercise of his fine thoughts and talents, which I never enter. I am shut up like a caged bird, to trim my feathers, and warble if I will; to peck from his hand, and receive all I have from him; and then he goes away into his great, grand world, and I am nothing.”

Jessie was not far wrong in this picture of herself, and she felt its truth the more when, one day after receiving a letter which she saw the housekeeper place in her master's hand, he told her that he had occasion to make a little journey, which would not, however, keep him many days from home.

Jessie asked where he was going.

He hesitated a moment, and then said, “To Brighton.”

“What an immense way!” exclaimed Jessie. “Can you not take me with you? I never saw Brighton.”

The doctor frowned, and looked rather uncomfortable.

“My love,” he said hurriedly, “I am going on urgent business. It is quite impossible that I should take you.”

“Oh, do let me go!” said Jessie again. “I am so dull here!” And she burst into tears.

Her husband drew his arm round her, and kissed her, she fancied not quite so tenderly as usual. He soon relaxed his hold, and turning sharply to the housekeeper, bade her put up for him a few things in his portmanteau. After which he went out to visit some of his patients, came back late in the evening, rummaged among a file



of papers, took a hasty leave of his wife, and went off by the night mail to London.

In addition to the misery of her loneliness, and the pain she had suffered from her husband's hurried and somewhat absolute manner, Jessie felt that in the secret of her heart she was becoming a little afraid of him—not afraid in the way of manifesting her tenderness, but rather afraid of him as a kind of stranger, who only visited her at times in her little narrow region of domestic love, but went out to expend the strength of his character—its real height and depth—elsewhere. The man who came back like a wandering knight to her bower, she could not fear; but the man who went forth clad in strange armor, who went where she could not follow him, and returned from people and places all unknown to her—him she did almost fear, because she could not penetrate that other life which he was leading, so widely was it separated from her own.

And thus it must ever be where there is no union but that of love—no sharing of high hopes or deep responsibilities—no sharing even of the labors and resources of the mind, so that each, though ever so widely separated from the other personally, and for a while, may yet bring home their different treasures for a mutual feast. No, the woman who is only loved must often be lonely, unless, indeed, she is wholly destitute of mind, and thus incapable of any other vocation. She will often be liable to become afraid of her husband, too; for though perfect love casteth out fear, the love here described is not perfect—far otherwise.

The great joy of receiving her husband back again, after an absence of a few days, was so much to Jessie that she failed, at first, to detect any thing but the same pleasure on his part. Indeed, he also was delighted to be again seated in his own chair, beside his own pleasant



hearth, with his young wife beside him; and for a while there was no want between them of mutual expressions of tenderness, and of rejoicing over their reunion.

As the evening passed on, however, Jessie began to think her husband more absent or more absorbed in thought than usual, and in his face there was a slight indication of discontent, which she did not like to see, because, as it did not in any way relate to her, it proved too plainly that his thoughts were wandering from her; and perhaps it proved, also, that some other person had the power to vex him more than she had just then the power to please.

It must be understood of Jessie that she was capable, in no ordinary degree, of the feeling of jealousy. Rivalry is the twin sister of jealousy; and it was rivalry alone which had stimulated her to work hard at school, in order to stand first among her companions. It was rivalry which subsequently made her a coquette. But there must be no rivalry now—not even a thought of her husband's stolen away from her, if she could prevent it. So she looked at his grave face as he sat watching the fire within the bars of the grate, until at last she said,

“Has any one vexed you while you were away?”

A sudden turn of her husband's face toward her, so quick that it made her start, and a most unusual flash of his deep-set eyes, convinced Jessie that this was the kind of question it would be wiser for her not to ask again.

Very soon afterward the doctor rose from his chair, said he was thoroughly warmed and refreshed, and would go out for an hour before bedtime to see one of his patients whom he had left very ill.



## CHAPTER IV.

It was almost impossible for a young wife, situated like Jessie, not to be sometimes a little teasing with that love which she thought so much about. In fact, she had nothing else to live upon; no mental food—no physical exertion—nothing but that. A man who does not want to be so teased should take care to supply his wife with something to think about and something to do. The doctor was first teased, and then at times a little tired—it was in the nature of things that he should be so. The next thing was to absent himself a little more, to live more apart, mentally as well as personally; and to keep his thoughts and feelings, if possible, more hidden than before.

An idle, loving, petted wife is a very difficult subject, for a man who is thus disposed, to have to deal with. Poor Jessie, with her heart ever hungering after evidences of affection, and her fancy ever harping on the old string, “Am I loved as I am loving?” was not to be put off in this way. Her beauty and her charms, and the empire they had obtained for her, were not made to give place to anatomical investigations or chemical analysis; not even to the requirements of the Board of Health, nor to strictures upon sewerage—all-important as these might be to others. They were nothing to her. The whole world, with its multitudinous wants and woes, was nothing in comparison with the one great want of her heart, to be the first and only occupant of her husband’s regard, and the one great woe of finding that she was not so.

In proportion as the doctor tried to absent himself a



little more, even at home, so as to pursue his favorite studies without interruption, and found his intentions often frustrated, he became somewhat captious and peevish at times; so there grew to be lovers' quarrels between the two—made up again, however, by warmer love and tenderer expressions than before. But this also grew a little wearisome to the man, who had so much to do that he sought only rest and peace at home. So there was nothing for it but to speak more plainly to Jessie, in order that his time and patience might not both be eventually trifled away. Thus it was made known to her, gently and kindly it is true, but yet with considerable emphasis and decision, that a doctor's study was not the place for her; that he must consequently beg of her always to knock when she wished to speak to him; and perhaps, if she *could* leave him there a little more alone, it might be better for them both.

The doctor said this with his eyes averted, for he felt very uncomfortable at having it to say. It was well he did so. Those large, dark, passionate eyes of Jessie's would have terrified him, had he looked round. The rich warm blood that circled so healthily throughout her frame rushed up to her cheeks and her temples, until her face felt for a moment in a blaze. The long-drawn breath she took was not a sigh—it was a gasp. She was going to answer in a perfect storm of indignation, but that there was a choking in her throat which stopped all utterance; and yet she would not cry—not she!

The doctor went into his study without once looking back; and Jessie never had to be told a second time that she must knock at the door if she wanted him, but had better not intrude upon his privacy at all.

With all passionate natures—at least, in women—there comes a terrible revulsion of feeling after any fit of anger or excitement. Under these circumstances Jes-



sie had lately shown symptoms of hysterical tendencies, and while thus affected, old Mabel, the housekeeper, was very kind to her, only kind in a peculiar way. On the present occasion, when Jessie had rushed up stairs and thrown herself on her bed, weeping bitterly, Mabel, who had seen her face as she came out of the room where her husband had left her, and partly from that, and partly from her master's manner, had formed her own conclusions, went quietly up stairs, pretending to have something to do in the room where her young mistress lay weeping so passionately that she neither saw nor heard her enter. The first thing Jessie was sensible of, beyond her own grief, was that a hand was laid upon her shoulder; and, looking up, she saw that Mabel had brought her the only remedy for sorrow which her practical notions of kindness suggested—a strong dose of hot brandy and water, which she first persuaded her mistress to sip, and then to swallow down altogether.

"I wouldn't take on so if I was you," said Mabel. "Master gets worried."

"Who worries him?" asked Jessie, feeling a little strengthened by Mabel's medicine.

"A deal o' folks," was the only answer she elicited.

But, from some cause or other, in a few minutes more she did not seem to care so very much—she did not care very much about any thing, in fact—but wiped the tears from her cheeks, composed her hair, adjusted her pillow, and fell fast asleep.

"Well, it *is* something," thought Jessie, "to be able to sleep a while, and so forget one's trouble." But it came again after she had risen, though not quite so acutely; and, dressing herself with a good deal of care, she went down to spend the evening with her husband, looking, he thought, more beautiful than ever; for there was the weight of recent tears upon her long eyelashes,



making them look darker, and that brilliant flush in her cheeks which he had begun to fear she was losing.

So days and weeks passed on, and Jessie grew more hysterical, instead of less so, under Mabel's treatment. She was ashamed of it herself, but either tried in the wrong way, or did not try sufficiently, to prevent the fits coming on. Mabel alone knew how frequent and distressing they were; for Jessie did not tell her husband always how she had been affected. He saw for himself that she was suffering from loneliness; but it never occurred to him that want of occupation was her worst disease, and that talents and energies entirely without exercise were inducing a condition little better than insanity. Strange infatuation! He was a doctor, and would have known this in any other person's case; but his beautiful young wife was, in his eyes, so peculiar, so entirely set apart, so exclusively his own, to be cherished, comforted, and cared for by him—her office, he conceived, was so entirely that of loving him, that the accustomed remedies were in no way applicable in her case, if indeed, there could be any need for them. The one wish of his heart—indeed, of both their hearts—was for children, and then Jessie would have enough to do; but this blessing not being granted them, why, he must pet her and soothe her, dear child, and try to get her out of these melancholy moods.

In order to supply, in some degree, the great want of her heart and home, Jessie thought sometimes she would adopt a child; but then she might afterward have children of her own, and how she should hate such an intruder then! Besides which, she did not think she ever could really love another person's child. Indeed, she had been very sparing of her love since the time of her marriage. So absorbed had she been in the mutual interests of herself and her husband, that she had repelled



all advances toward intimacy from the friends and acquaintances who composed the social circle of which she ought properly to have constituted a part. Of these some were offended, others ceased to care; while the few with whom she kept up a sort of formal visiting found her so profoundly indifferent to all their personal or domestic matters, that they ceased to take interest in hers. They supposed the doctor was happy with her; but, for their parts, they shrugged their shoulders, and turned to more amusing topics of conversation.

At last Jessie hit upon a scheme herself. Her health she thought was failing. You would scarcely have supposed so to look at her, and the doctor absolutely laughed when she asked his professional aid. Still, with her frequent hysterical attacks, and perhaps a little in consequence of Mabel's patent nostrums, Jessie certainly had some indescribable sinkings and strange sensations, which occupied her thoughts a good deal, seeming, in some sort, to help to fill that dreadful void which was becoming almost intolerable; and so being, as, alas! a morbid apprehension about ill health not unfrequently is, a little more amusing than just nothing at all.

So one day, when Jessie sat alone with her husband, she plucked up her courage, and said,

"I think I should like to have a companion. What do you think? Some nice kind of young woman, who would sit with me when I wanted her, and not mind being sent out of the room when I did not."

The doctor looked very earnestly at his wife, but said nothing.

"You do not answer me," said Jessie.

"It is too serious a question to be answered at once."

"But will you think about it? You see I get so much weaker. Now don't laugh, for I really do."

"I see you are very lonely, poor child, and I wish it



could be otherwise; but we might bring a person into the family who would be a terrible annoyance."

"We could send her away in that case."

"Not quite so easily as you think, perhaps."

"You will think about it, then?"

"I will; only promise me one thing."

"I will."

"That it shall never be a cause of bitterness or disunion between us."

"How should it?"

"Nay, I don't know. Only such schemes sometimes do end in bitterness and disunion."

"But I don't want a person to care for at all—not even one who will expect to be cared for."

The doctor smiled a little at the pleasant life his wife's companion would have of it on such terms. He said no more, however, just then, but went away with his mind full of deep and stirring thoughts, which so hung about him as to make him more than usually grave and silent during the few days which intervened before his wife spoke again about the companion, and how necessary she believed it to be for her health and spirits that she should have some one about her with whom she could exchange a few words now and then, instead of being left so much alone.

The doctor was far from being displeased at having the subject renewed; for he also had been thinking of the same thing, almost to the exclusion of all others; and not being particularly occupied one evening, he thought he would give up an hour or two in order to talk the matter fairly over.

"You are really in earnest, then?" said he to his wife.

"Indeed I am," she replied; "but the great difficulty is where to find the sort of person I want."



"What is it that you do want?"

"Oh! very little—only a nice, kind young person, who will attach herself to me, and be very faithful and devoted, without being ever obtrusive."

"And you? What will you be to her?"

"Very kind, of course."

"And very considerate?"

"I don't know about that. I shall expect the consideration to come from her."

"All on one side then, it seems. In that case, how is your companion to attach herself to you?"

"You seem very particular that *she* should be considered. Pray do you know any one who would suit me?"

"What if I do?"

"If you do, pray tell me all you know. I feel quite impatient to have this matter settled."

"Will you leave the settling of it to me, Jessie?"

"Perhaps it would be better that I should. You know I don't like trouble. And then I see so very few people. I am sure I should never find any one by myself. Come, then, you are a good soul, and much wiser than I am. You shall help me over this difficulty, and find me a companion."

"And you will promise to be satisfied, if I do?"

"I will promise to try to be satisfied. I think that is all you can expect."

"Certainly. Only you must, indeed you must, be a little kind and considerate besides. Think of some poor young creature, perhaps an orphan, brought here among strangers."

"And a very nice thing it would be, in my opinion, for any poor orphan. However, I will promise you to be very good and very kind, if you will but find the right person."

"As good and as kind as you would like any lady to



be with whom you might place a daughter of your own, if you had one?"

"You put the case so strongly. I am a good mistress to my servants, am I not?"

"Ah! but I want you to be more like a mother to this young girl."

"Then you have one actually in your mind?"

"I have."

"Do tell me all about her, then. What age is she? What is she like?—a lady, or a common person?"

"I have never told you, up to this time, Jessie, that I have a young girl under my care—a ward—and that it is now my duty to place this girl out somewhere."

"Is she a relation?"

"Why, yes—a sort of relation."

"An orphan?"

"Her mother died when she was very young."

"And her father?"

"Her father?—that is a painful subject. You must never speak to her about her father if she comes to live here."

"I dare say I shall never wish to do so. Her father won't trouble me, unless he should follow her here."

"Rest assured about that; he will never trouble you. In that respect you will be perfectly safe in taking this young person into the family, for she has very few relations living, and none who do any thing for her but myself."

Jessie was surprised to find so little objection on her husband's part to this scheme of hers; perhaps surprised, also, at the nature of the few objections which he did bring forward; and perhaps, had the whole truth been told, the readiness with which he fell in with her plan gave rise to a certain feeling of disappointment in her mind, which she would have found it difficult to explain.



She had imagined that a third person added to their family could scarcely be looked upon by her husband in any other light than that of an intruder; yet, to her astonishment, he began almost at once to interest himself in those household arrangements which were necessary for the change; and he did so with a degree of cheerfulness and alacrity which somewhat piqued her self-love. "As if he had actually grown tired of my company alone," she said; and it is just possible that this interest on her husband's part took off a little from the cordiality of the welcome with which Jessie had intended to receive her companion.

Of course there was considerable curiosity, on the part of the wife, to know more about this anticipated inmate of her household; but her inquiries elicited very little more from her husband than that the age of the young person was scarcely seventeen, her education that of a gentlewoman, and beyond this, that she was delicate—the doctor feared *very* delicate.

This last piece of information was communicated after the most important arrangements had been made, or Jessie would have decidedly objected to a *delicate* companion—any thing but that. A girl who required looking after and taking care of would never do for her.

"You forget that I am a doctor," said her husband, in answer to these objections, "and that the responsibility will consequently devolve on me, not you."

But Jessie was far from being comforted. She wanted to be nursed, and tended, and cared for herself. Her idea of a companion was a robust sort of person, who would never be either ailing or tired—who would read to her, work for her, go errands, and do all that sort of thing, without taking harm from wind or weather—not even from late sitting up, or early rising, or any other of those irksome duties which Jessie had been pleasing



herself with the idea that she should henceforward perform by proxy.

Alas! her pleasant prospect of exemption and relief had been sadly spoiled by that word of ill omen, delicate. However, as she had only promised her husband to *try* to be satisfied with his choice of a companion, the fact of her being delicate might afford a reasonable plea for getting rid of her.

So Jessie submitted to her fate, and after some correspondence between her husband and the "young person," as Jessie chose to call her, the doctor set out by agreement to meet her at the last stage before reaching Larchfield.

Jessie felt very nervous and strange about the time when she thought the travelers would be arriving. Mabel, the housekeeper, seemed to be nervous too. Indeed, ever since the plan was divulged to her, she had evinced an unusual amount of irritation. "People could please themselves," she kept saying, as she went grumbling about the house. "It was no business of hers; but of all the schemes she ever heard of!"—and here she would stop to scold the kitchen-maid, or find fault with the boy, for nothing went right in any department; and if ever the expression, "turned upside down," was applicable to any domestic economy, you would have thought it was to that under Mabel's management, had you heard her then.

## CHAPTER V.

At last they came. The night was stormy: the wind had blown long tendrils of disordered hair about the girl's face, which looked, on first coming into the lighted room, almost as white as snow. She trembled, too, with the cold and long traveling, and the doctor bade her go



and warm herself thoroughly at the fire ; but she stood back, looking perfectly frightened. He then called the housekeeper to show her up stairs ; but, instead of Mabel, another servant came ; and all the while Jessie had been so painfully struck with the delicate appearance of the stranger, as scarcely to have received her with any pretense to a welcome. "A poor, thin ghost of a creature !" said Jessie to herself. "What in the world am I to do with her?"

There certainly was a somewhat striking contrast betwixt Jessie's round and comfortable-looking form—her glowing color, as it happened to be that night—the compact arrangement of her rich abundant hair—her dress so perfectly adapted and fitting to her figure—and this frail-looking, frightened girl, blown about by the winds, and altogether bearing the appearance of one who had known little of the cheering comforts of a plentiful and genial home.

"You must remember," said the doctor to his wife, so soon as the stranger had left the room, "that she has been nearly all her life at school."

"I should scarcely have thought it," said Jessie, rather sneeringly. "But I dare say it is cold and miserable traveling in this weather. Perhaps she will look more comfortable after a while."

"Jessie," said her husband, taking hold of both her hands, and looking steadily into her face, "you must try to make her comfortable—you must show her how good and kind you can be."

"Really," said Jessie, with a peculiar little laugh, which means any thing but fun, "you seem to me to have strangely reversed the whole affair of this girl's coming."

"How so?"

"You talk as if you had brought some one here for



me to take care of, instead of some one to take care of me."

"Don't misunderstand me, Jessie. I mean no such thing. It is my intention, and I will see it carried out, that this 'young person,' as you call her, shall serve you in every way that is possible to her, and right toward you. Ask what you will of her, lay down her duties to any extent that she is capable of, and I will see that your wishes are carried out. Beyond this I can do no more for you, can I?"

Jessie was compelled to be satisfied. At all events, she could say no more just then; for the pale girl came down, having arranged her hair, which was really beautiful, into a mass of ringlets, hanging loosely about her neck and temples—a style of hair which Jessie particularly disliked; and, in the plainest possible dress of sober gray, she stole rather than walked into the room, for the frightened look was still there, and she scarcely ventured to answer audibly, even when Jessie condescended to ask her about her journey.

The doctor did his part to reassure the stranger, and Jessie might see that whenever the girl did raise her eyes, it was to look into his face, as if to read there some direction about her behavior which might help her to do right.

By degrees, in this watchful manner, the poor stranger seemed to read her way; but it was only in the presence of the doctor that she saw her way at all. Left alone with the mistress of the house, she knew neither what to say nor what to do, and consequently was continually saying and doing the wrong thing; when, finding out her mistake, she grew embarrassed, and more frightened than before.

It was impossible that much usefulness, to say nothing of agreeableness, should be elicited from a young



girl fresh from school, and thus circumstanced. The discipline and economy of a genteel private family were entirely new to her ; with the servants of such a family she had never come in contact ; while a lady looking the picture of health, who required constantly watching, and helping, and cherishing, was a phenomenon so wholly unaccountable to the girl, that she could only raise her wondering eyes askance to take sly glances at Jessie's extreme beauty, without venturing to address her in the way of conversation, or even asking her any ordinary question.

Wholly shut up within herself through the greater portion of every day, and quite unable to bring any feeling or faculty of her own to bear upon the circumstances around her, there could be no wonder that the sound of the doctor's welcome step in the hall should bring a flush of pleasure into the pale, thin face, which had never worn the aspect of any kind of expression since he went out in the morning ; no wonder either that his fine manly voice, as it called "Lina" on the stairs, should bring a light figure flying down the steps to take his coat, his gloves, or whatever he might want to get rid of in haste ; and all this with a look as bright, and an answer as quick and cheerful, as if the pale face and the slight figure had really a heart belonging to them as warm as any other woman's heart—yes, and warmer than a great many.

The new-comer was not so dull in her perceptions but that she could see plainly she was not giving satisfaction ; that, in fact, she never could give satisfaction without learning more of the character and the wishes of the lady of the house than seemed possible at present ; while Jessie, instead of doing herself justice, was less open and agreeable to her companion than to any other person in the house.

Something had evidently gone wrong with the two



women at the onset of their acquaintance, and they neither of them—not even Jessie herself—knew exactly what it was. In fact, Jessie was beginning to attribute every thing wrong on her part to suffering nerves. What unoccupied woman does not? Distressing nervous sensations were her constant complaint; and this it was, she said, which made her irritable, restless, and weary. How should she be otherwise than weary, having no alternative of work? Idleness—that seeming friend, that real tyrant—was already undermining her fine constitution, both of mind and body; and the bitter fruits of discontent were threatening to poison all her social and domestic pleasures.

Jessie was not naturally spiteful; yet no sooner was she now left alone with her husband on his return home, than she grew eloquent in disparagement of the companion he had chosen for her; and who, she told him plainly, so far as she was concerned, “did not do at all, and never would do.”

“Have you explained to her,” asked the doctor, “what it is that you expect from her?”

“No; that would be impossible in my state of health. I ought to have a person with me who has all the nice feeling and the tact to anticipate my wishes, not one who requires to be told the merest trifles of the passing moment.”

“Come, Jessie,” said her husband, looking kindly but earnestly into her face, “be your own better self again. Be reasonable, and I know you will soon be happy.”

“Never with that girl!”

“Why, she only wants drawing out. I feel sure she is both kind and willing, if she did but know what to do.”

“To you, perhaps, she may be kind and willing.”

“Well, you see how I set her to work. I tell her what to do, and she does it instantly.”



"You have strength and nerve for these things ; I have not. Besides—"

"What else?"

"I don't like her."

"Well, that is plain, certainly. Have you any real grounds for thinking ill of her?"

"She never looks me full in the face ; but, if I happen to turn my head suddenly, I find her staring at me."

"Is that any crime, Jessie? I think you must have found that other people like to look at you besides this poor child."

"Beyond this, there seems to me something sinister about her, if not absolutely sly."

"Think of her situation."

"I do, and I consider it a highly privileged one. Don't think, however, that what I say arises out of prejudice. Mabel thinks the same, I believe, if she only dared to speak her mind."

"Mabel is an old— But that is little to the point. All that I ask of you, Jessie, is to deal faithfully with the girl. In this you do both greater justice to her, and greater honor to yourself. I don't want it to be said of you that you are a weak, capricious woman, as I am sure it will be if you send this girl away without allowing her a fair and honest trial ; and that you can never do without bestowing a little pains upon teaching her what is her duty, and what you expect from her."

"Honestly, then, do *you* like her?"

"What an absurd question, Jessie!"

"Not at all. Tell me truly whether you do or not."

"I! I like her very well. But, you know, there is a vast difference betwixt a girl like her and a man of my age."

"Yet it seems to me that she understands you better than she does me, notwithstanding that difference."



"Perhaps I take more pains to make her understand me. But here she comes—along with her my old dog. You see, Jessie, she has made friends with him, at any rate. I never saw him take to any body so soon before. And the cat—I found the cat sitting on her shoulder, and the dog lying with his head on her lap, when I came home yesterday."

"Where?"

"In my study."

"Your study!"

"Yes; she had the key, because I wanted her to stitch up those holes in my table-cover, which I suppose the cat must have torn. Well, Lina," said the doctor, looking evidently pleased, "have you attended to the camelias to-day? I have been wondering whether the greenhouse windows were opened."

"I opened them soon after you were gone, and shut them about three o'clock, for the wind grew cold."

"His study!" said Jessie to herself; "that sacred place which I was not to enter!"

It is said that women's tongues are apt to run too fast, but there are occasions when to speak is impossible, even to them; and if any woman—*almost* any—would look back to those passages in her life when she felt the most, she would find it had been when her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth, when her lips felt dry and paralyzed, when fire seemed flashing before her eyes, the rush of many waters sounding in her ears, and yet she spoke not—could not speak. And those who had brought her to this pass knew nothing of what they had done, but went their way, contented with themselves and with her.

It was thus that Jesse stood to hear of another being permitted to go where she might not. No reasonable conclusion presented itself to her distracted mind, that



it was because of the vast difference betwixt that other and herself—because that other was a mere child, not mature enough to understand or participate in what might be around her there—in reality, in her innocent unconsciousness only one remove from the pet animals allowed free access to that room. The *fact* was, then, Jessie felt, to stare her in the face; and with flashing eyes, and burning cheeks, and desperate resolution, she rushed upon it like some doomed victim eager for instant death.

A doom it might be, but it was not death. No. There are after hours, and days, and weeks, and months, which an impassioned nature always finds more difficult to endure than the sharp agony of a sudden grief, however intense that may be. Any thing quick, any thing decisive, may seem, under certain circumstances, congenial to such a nature; but the long interval of suspended hope and fear, the helpless waiting for the future, the stillness of uncertainty—these are what a passionate nature can not master, unless, indeed, there is some active, stirring occupation for the energies to dash at, so that the physical forces, at least, may become exhausted, and thus repose of mind be purchased by that wholesome medicine which kind nature, the best physician, would prescribe for all.

There were times, about this period of her life, when Jessie felt as if her senses were actually giving way; and yet she did not know what ailed her. Was it her nerves or her passions that were in fault? Sometimes, indeed, the cloud vanished, and she could have laughed at herself for being so wretched without a cause; particularly when, as the spring ripened into summer, and her husband found now and then a little time for walking with her in the fields and lanes, and thus she was herself again—again a happy, honored wife—all things




ministering to her supremacy, and scarcely a thought, as she fancied, in her husband's mind, which did not centre in herself. Such was the lesson he had taught her in the first flush of their married happiness. How was she to unlearn it now? Ah! there are looks of tenderness, and words of love, and little acts of homage, which a man so easily forgets—a woman never.

Jessie had all these treasured up in her memory more carefully than ever costly gem, or bridal gift, or tangible love-token was treasured. And now, if ever a smile was less tender, a word less affectionately toned, an act less flattering than formerly, she was able to compare each with its prototype, hid up in her treasury, and so to weigh, and measure, and finally to ascertain, by such comparison, whether the present had deteriorated so much as one iota from the value of the past.

This is what women occupy themselves with when left entirely to cultivate and feed upon the affections of the heart, without other employment or other sustenance. And a very sad affair they make of it, poor souls!—loitering forever in a little garden of jasmine and roses, with nothing but perfume to offer to their lords, instead of reaping in the harvest field, and bringing home the golden sheaves; and so making bread, and food, and solid nutriment the foundation of a truer appetite for fruits and flowers.

But yet Jessie was almost happy again sometimes even now; and when she was so, kindly feelings would rush back again into her heart, and she would then speak almost kindly even to the orphan girl, her companion. She might, indeed, have done this more frequently, but that an influence reached her from old Mabel and the other servants, which she would have been ashamed to acknowledge as such, and yet was unable entirely to withstand.





It is wonderful what power such people have when they conspire to set themselves against any inmate of the household where they live, especially if such unfortunate being should be unsupported by substantial relatives and home connections, or be in any way suspected of being poor and dependent. The first thing they seem to anticipate, when their mistress engages a companion, is a spy—a sort of go-between, whose especial office is to carry information from the kitchen to the parlor. Hence their united jealousy and determined opposition.

In the present instance, the poor stranger who gave such deep offense was as unconscious of the true condition of the kitchen as she was ignorant of the proper duties of its occupants; nor was she at all more disposed to make a party among them, either for or against herself. All that she had thus far aimed at was not to give offense; and yet she never could do right. The work she made in the house, Mabel said, nobody could believe. It was one person's work to tidy up after her. She never went out of the house but Mabel thought she ought to have gone sooner, or might have waited until another time; nor remained in, but Mabel charged her with idleness. And so it was throughout her innocent life; for, though we do not pretend that a little practical knowledge of common things would not have been a great advantage to the girl, and sometimes a real saving of trouble in the house, yet nobody being so kind as to impart to her this knowledge, she went on sinning, if she sinned at all, unconsciously, and, happily for her, knew nothing of what the servants were talking about among themselves.

Had they confined their remarks within their own department, less harm would have been done. But, by a strange gift of nature, in which she appears to have done



herself great injustice, there is a power, exercised sometimes by kindly-disposed women, of conveying little crumbs of bitterness into the most carefully-prepared and otherwise palatable and wholesome food; so that while they tell a pleasant story, or even report a common fact, they can so manage to serve it up as to leave a disagreeable taste upon the palate of the hearer long after the sweetness or the refreshment of the repast is gone.

Thus it was that Mabel seldom went into the presence of her mistress to discuss any domestic matters, however necessary, or even pleasant in themselves, but she contrived to drop in some hint about "Miss," as she called the young lady; and sometimes, unfortunately, it happened to be how master had ordered something to be done for Miss. As, for instance, that she should have a cold bath every morning, which caused, as it seemed, an inconceivable amount of trouble, and damped the furniture of the room, and destroyed the paper. And then the wet towels that were thrown about, and the time they took to dry, making the kitchen all day like a common wash-house, until they could not see one another for steam and stew. And as for rheumatics, never in her life had Mabel suffered as she had done since Miss began with her bath.

Perhaps the reciter of these, and many other little episodes in domestic life, never noticed how a deep red flush would pass over the face of her mistress while listening to such tales; or, if she did notice it, less pardonable was the persistence with which she went on, setting forth many a simple matter in such a light as to make it wear an aspect which was any thing but flattering and agreeable to the lady of the house. Nor were there wanting occasions in which feminine fancy could so twist and torture what was done for the stranger as to



make it appear more than had ever been done for the wife.

Jessie was yet too proud to allow her servant to see that she put this construction on her stories. The deep burning blush she could not help; but she mostly so managed as to turn her head away, to stoop, or to busy herself with something in another part of the room; only Mabel must have known it was most frequently after such interviews that the nervous attacks came on, when those restoratives were administered which Mabel considered indispensable in all nervous ailments.

On one of these occasions Mabel had managed to betray that her master did not always come home alone, but was met somewhere by Miss, and so they returned together. Jessie said nothing at the time—perhaps betrayed nothing; but many an evening after this she might have been found looking sideways from a particular window, which commanded a view of the road by which her husband usually returned, so as to enter at a garden gate of which he kept a private key.

From this window Jessie could observe almost the whole of the garden, as well as a portion of the road; and, truly enough, she did see her husband and Lina returning together, apparently in the highest spirits, the girl hanging on his arm, with her hands clasped over it; only, as soon as the garden door was opened, she rushed in, threw off her bonnet, shook back her clustering ringlets from her face, and then ran hither and thither among the flower-beds, looking as happy as a young kitten at play.

Jessie never saw the girl look or act in this way in her presence. She thought her husband, too, had something of a youthful air, as, half in play, he remonstrated with the wild creature who was carelessly breaking down his favorite flowers. Not that Lina was apt to do



mischievous in the garden. She was a true lover of flowers, as well as of animals. But sometimes nature and youth combined would burst forth even with her; and, from the very rarity of such ebullitions, they were, perhaps, the more extreme.

Jessie looked miserably down upon the scene. Yes, miserably; for she half envied its enjoyment—half suspected its innocence. It did not certainly look like anything wrong. Why could not she go down and share that healthy, wholesome joy?

For a garden, simply as such, Jessie never could persuade herself to care, though it was one of her husband's chief delights; botanical as well as floral studies being, with him, a favorite resource in the midst of more laborious occupations. Jessie liked the general aspect of the garden well enough—its perfume too; but, above all, its gorgeous colors. She liked its luxurious seats and dreamy walks—its idleness, and sometimes its seclusion. Thus she had not been unwilling to loiter with her husband about the garden in the evenings of the first summer after their marriage. But since he had begun to drop her arm, as he now so often did, in order to gather up some drooping flower, or even to bud a rose or graft a pear, Jessie had grown jealous of the garden with its fair inhabitants, and took but little pleasure in it altogether. What will not a vain, pampered woman grow jealous of, with nothing else to do?

Still there was a better nature at work in Jessie's heart, ever at war with this her meaner nature, and hence the almost constant dissatisfaction which now pervaded her life. There was a nature at work, too, which could make her so gentle and so loving, so altogether charming in a way impossible to describe, that when her husband left her, as he did sometimes, vexed and annoyed beyond expression, he had only to recall her looks,



her words, on some bygone occasion, but especially her deep and absorbing love for himself, and he would return to her with all the ardor of a lover, mingled with the calmer satisfaction which a husband feels for a true and faithful wife.

## CHAPTER VI.

WHEN a man has to be driven back, by the disturbance or discomfort of the present, to recall what his wife was in the past, the domestic happiness of such a couple may be said to tremble like a ruin tottering to its fall. Woman has a strange faculty for hoarding these treasured memories, so as to clothe again her broken idol in all the splendor or the beauty of its former state. But with man this seems to be impossible—unnatural; and woman does wisely to lay it to her account that it is so. That breath which chills or scorches up the present with man, passes also over his past, until the temple of his once familiar joys becomes to him as the chamber of death, and he enters it no more. Thus does it behoove all women who have to do with men to be careful of the present—lose that, and the chances are that they lose all.

Like many another clever man, Dr. Thompson went about his accustomed avocations, profoundly ignorant of what was stirring in that little world of feeling which lived within the hearts of those around him. He was curious about the functions of fossil animals; and few men could discourse more knowingly than he upon the different formations which appertained to any given stratum of the structure of the earth. He was engaged, indeed, about this time, in delivering a course of lectures on fossil remains at a Mechanics' Institute in a neighboring town. His audience listened to him during these



lectures with something bordering upon awe, so profound was their wonder at the extent of knowledge, as well as the minuteness of research, by which the information he conveyed was so strikingly characterized.

Yet, as already said, there was one little world of which he knew no more than a mere child. We call it a *little* world, because it is so often overlooked or neglected by those who are esteemed wise. But when we reflect that in this world live all the motives by which mankind are influenced, and that out of this world spring all the designs which ripen into action, we see that it can be no little world, because both good and evil have their habitation there. It was the human heart, with all its hidden hopes and fears, its palpitating agonies, its ecstatic joys, with which this wise man was so little acquainted. He knew all sorts of hearts in their fleshly capacity, and could explain their valves and lobes, with all their vital functions, and their intricate economy; but the heart of his own wife, much as he liked to hold the key of it, was a sealed casket to him, and likely to remain so, notwithstanding all his wisdom.

We have said that Dr. Thompson was a good man, as well as wise, and in a certain way this was unquestionably true. In the first place, he was punctual in the observance of *religious* duties—as if all duties were not religious. He was a stanch upholder of the form of worship by law established. He would not have been absent from his place at church for any light consideration, and a patient of his must have been very ill indeed to keep him from the morning service. He had morning and evening prayers in his own family; and all these Christian duties being done, and done faithfully, the doctor seemed to have no disposition, and, in fact, no need to make religion the subject of his conversation—not so much as the subject of comment or inquiry,



even with regard to those who were nearest and dearest to him.

Hence on this one important topic his wife and he were as entire strangers as if they had never addressed each other in the language of affection. Jessie, above most women, sorely needed a friend and counselor here; but she failed to find one. She was afraid to speak plainly on this subject, and none of her hints elicited one word to the purpose. She thought her husband did not care; and what with her nerves, and her vacant life, her fretted feelings, and too often her excited brain, she almost longed at times to do something actually wrong, that she might have some real cause for repentance.

Of nothing like this did the doctor so much as dream. His wife had a companion now, so he thought all must be right, though she would not own it. So far from that, she complained, found fault, and was continually putting herself out about trifles; but that, he thought, most women did. So there *could* be nothing devolving upon him, in relation to his beautiful young wife, except to love her, and that, of course, he did; though he might, had he been perfectly honest, have begun to confess to a little distaste to her company at times—a little eagerness to escape from it when she was most unreasonable, and a little hesitation about returning, unless he could feel sure that her humor had changed since the morning.

In this state of things it was quite natural that the doctor should find a certain kind of relief in the society of a young girl who had no humors, who never troubled him about her feelings—who, in fact, never troubled him at all; but met him with good-humor, laughed when he was merry, and who did all the little services for him which he required, without requiring any thing in return. So, as already said, the doctor thought he had done all he could in satisfying his wife's desire for a companion;



and, with this comfortable conviction, he went out and came in, without once suspecting that there was any thing materially wrong at the foundation of his domestic comfort.

And there beside him sat that dark-eyed woman, with her hungry heart, and nothing to feed upon but the husks of withered love; for she knew that it was withered, though he did not. She sat there, not unfrequently, with an expression on her countenance that would have startled almost any other man. She sat there waiting, and wondering, perhaps, in her secret thoughts, whether there would ever come again fresh greenness in her faded bower, or whether now it would be winter always, with frost, and cold, and nakedness of branch and bough.

At length there came a time—and it was not very long in coming—when the husband was absolutely tired—tired of consoling unreasonable griefs, and of trying to alleviate imaginary woes; tired, too, perhaps, of hearing his wife perpetually cast blame upon her young companion for every thing, whether real or imaginary, which brought agitation or discomfort to herself—tired altogether. What man would not be tired, under such circumstances, however beautiful his wife might be?

As it is impossible to hear an innocent person, *against whom we have no pique*, unjustly and continually blamed without liking them the better, and endeavoring to keep them from being entirely trampled down; so it might be in this spirit that the doctor tried to excuse what seemed wrong in Lina, and finally brought upon himself the charge of being partial to the girl—kinder to her a great deal than she deserved, and more considerate to her than he was to his own wife.

If any thing can effectually drive a man away, it is precisely this style of complaint. Jessie tried it only once



or twice, and then, taking warning by the mischief she had done, kept whatever suspicions she might entertain in this quarter carefully locked within her own breast. Thus the subjects on which they could not, and dared not, speak to each other were daily multiplying between the husband and the wife. Each was now, to some extent, leading a separate life; and that strangeness, on Jessie's part, which we have called fear, was rapidly increasing.

If they had only had points of contact wholly separate from their affections—subjects for intercourse to which love bore no relation—good intellectual companionship and mutual work, with charity, or any kind of usefulness for its definite aim, all might have been well with them. But now, what was to be done?

The man did well enough. He had endless pursuits—objects of never-failing interest. He became more mixed up than formerly with the social and political interests of the place in which he lived—people said to the injury of his profession; but he was a man in easy circumstances, and did not care much what profession he followed, so long as he was useful, and could help his neighbors a little to get on in life, as well as to live.

But while he busied himself in this useful and satisfactory manner, the worst of all diseases was coming upon Jessie in the form of a diseased imagination, which saw what never existed, heard what was never spoken, and believed what had no truth. And on these points nothing could undeceive her, because she communicated to no one what she imagined. It was, consequently, never brought to the test of clear and honest investigation.

Among other misconceptions of her disordered brain, Jessie began to cherish the idea that to fix upon her a particular person as a companion had been a preconcerted plan of her husband's, partly that he might always



have a spy upon her actions while himself away, and partly that he might have near him some favorite of his own. She could not—dared not surmise more than a *favorite*. Lina was so young, and, besides that, her childlike innocence would have silenced all more injurious surmises, had they presented themselves even as a passing thought.

No; Jessie never imagined any thing really wrong—not morally wrong on the part of her husband. Only how was she to account for one or two facts in which she could not be mistaken, without supposing a kind of secret understanding between her husband and the girl?

One of these facts consisted in an evident change in the girl herself, which Jessie observed without being able to induce her to explain it. Always timid and reserved with Jessie, she had lately become so in a still greater degree, and at the same time absent and depressed in spirits. Mabel could have told how this change had come about; for, urged on by an unconquerable desire to let the poor girl know how things really stood, she had opened upon her one day in a most merciless manner, until, beholding the sore distress and the bitter weeping which her malicious words occasioned, and alarmed at the idea of her master finding out what she had done, Mabel had become almost penitent, and implored the girl not to tell. So poor Lina went about with the painful consciousness that she was not only hateful to the servants, but even more hateful to the lady whom she was bound to serve, and help, and make herself valuable to, in any way that was possible to her. Yet *tell* she would not, having given her promise to that effect; but from that time her life became quite different to her—her path crooked and thorny, so that she knew not where to tread.

It was evident that Lina often wept. The doctor saw



this; but, thinking the cause might be some strange treatment on the part of his wife, he refrained from making any inquiry about her tears. They were only too apt to flow when he spoke kindly to her; for the girl was very desolate, and had been from her early childhood. Just that little portion of her first entrance into the doctor's family had been like a sunny spot in her existence—genial, bright, and warm. But the cold, shivering sense of standing alone among those who did not love her—nay, even those who hated her, came back again with Mabel's cruel words, and she burst into fresh floods of tears every time the remembrance of them was renewed.

In this state of mind, though Lina dared not tell her trouble, she felt impelled to seek the society of her only friend and protector more than she had ever done before; and, on condition that she would neither speak nor move about, she was allowed to spend hours in the doctor's study, often crouching upon the hearth-rug at his feet, absorbed in some book which he had chosen for her, or seated at the farthest corner of the room, with the old cat in her lap, while she pursued her needle-work with that silent steadiness which is acquired under a long system of absolute obedience.

Lina never rebelled. The doctor tested her continually for his own amusement; but she never foiled him, except that no insisting on his part, not even his kindest persuasions, could make her a cheerful, or even ordinarily interesting companion for Jessie. The doctor might have thought it was not in the girl to make herself agreeable—and certainly she had enjoyed but few advantages in that way—had not her pleasant chat with him, when he had time to talk with her, convinced him that the fault did not lie in her want of capability, neither could it be in any want of desire to give him



satisfaction by faithfully fulfilling the duties which he laid upon her.

"I try and try," she said one evening, when the doctor was remonstrating with her; "indeed I *do*, but nothing will come. I say, 'Yes, ma'am,' and 'No, ma'am,' just like some poor charity girl, and then I tremble all over, until I am sure I must seem to be either a great sinner or a great simpleton."

"You are a simpleton, Lina," said the doctor, "or you would overcome this hesitation. But what is the matter with you? Why did you start?"

"Hark!" said Lina, suddenly turning her head toward the window, which was low, and opened out upon a gravel walk. "Hark! I hear it again. Do you ever have robbers come about the house?"

"Robbers! You foolish child! What makes you ask?"

"Because I am quite sure I hear steps sometimes upon the gravel walk when I sit here after it is dark—stealthily-creeping steps; and once—now don't laugh—it is true as that I stand here—once I saw two eyes."

"Yes, when you looked in the glass I have no doubt you did."

"Ah! you may make game now, but some time you will see for yourself, and hear too."

"Well, I suppose I shall believe then. But in the mean time sit down again, Lina, and go on with your work, for I want to be very quiet."

True enough there were steps beside the study window that night, and had been many nights before. And eyes too—Lina was quite right there—large, dark, flaming eyes, staring almost close to the glass, through a gap left between the wall and the thick drapery, which would otherwise have prevented all possibility of any one seeing into the room from without. What was seen



within that room might have been seen by the whole world, it was in itself so innocent; but the circumstances altogether were strange, and not, in the ordinary course of domestic affairs, beyond suspicion; nor was the eye of the watcher disinclined to see harm, whether there was any real harm or not. Once—perhaps more than once—there were tears on the part of the younger of the two occupants of that room—sad weeping, which had to be soothed, and was soothed, apparently with much tenderness—Jessie believed with a kiss on parting for the night. But she now believed so many things, that this somewhat clearer evidence of her senses scarcely added to her previous suspicions.

Jessie was growing desperate. She dared not speak. Besides, if she did, what good could possibly follow? It would be as easy to put her off with falsehood spoken as with falsehood acted; and she was now quite certain that some secret lurked behind the scheme of this girl's having been brought into the house. While, therefore, they could so manage as to baffle all her attempts to find the secret out, there was little probability that any plain speaking of hers would unravel the mystery. She was afraid, too—more and more afraid, in proportion as she felt herself a stranger to the inner feelings of her husband, and he to hers. Besides which, people generally are afraid when they are pursuing a circuitous course, and at the same time conscious of doing wrong. For, if Jessie was not absolutely transgressing any moral law, she was feeling wrong, and being wrong; her whole life, in fact, was wrong, though in no very obvious manner, and it made her no better that others were also wrong.

So this most unhappy summer wore away at last, and autumn came with deepening gloom, and life itself seemed to be closing in upon Jessie like a vast tomb, in which



she was destined to linger out her days ; for to live, actually to live again, she believed impossible for her.

The question was whether Jessie ever had lived up to this time. Life was but a mean affair, if she had really lived. Surely she was capable of something better than this. Yet how was she to lift herself out of the old into the new and the higher life ? A married woman whose husband does not help her is, of all living creatures, least likely to help herself. She does not generally see that she wants helping, unless he sees and tells her so, faithfully and feelingly. Jessie knew that she was miserable, and even degraded, but was far enough from thinking that the cause lay in herself—any thing but that. In her own opinion she was the victim, and so unquestionably, to some extent, she was.

But the help—from what quarter was the help to come ? Jessie was young—perhaps a long life lay yet before her. Was it to be always thus, or worse ? for worse it must be, if not better. She was rapidly growing worse—sinking, deteriorating. She knew that, but how or why she could not tell ; and thus it was chiefly that she blamed her health and her nerves for want of something else to blame. She was certainly not well. Nobody could be well under such circumstances. But what was to alter these circumstances ? Ah ! how much kinder to us is the Author and Disposer of our lives than we are to each other, or even to ourselves !

On one of these autumn days, which had begun to close in so drearily, Jessie received the intelligence of her father having been attacked with sudden and serious illness ; and the same letter conveyed an urgent request from both parents that she would hasten to them without any unnecessary delay. Of course the doctor also was expected, and Jessie declared it was absolutely impossible for her to make the journey alone. Other-



wise he might have hesitated, for there was now an unusual demand upon his attention nearer home.

In the county jail, situated in the vicinity of Larchfield, symptoms had recently appeared of a malignant kind of fever, which Dr. Thompson obtained the credit of understanding how to treat. At all events, he was regarded as high authority in cases of this kind; and such was his social influence, added to a certain power over others peculiar to himself, that nurses and subordinates of every description were in the habit of asking directions from and obeying him more implicitly than any of the other medical attendants.

In comparison with claims like these, those of an old gentleman who had attained the age at which life becomes comparatively valueless, and one whose malady no medical skill could possibly remove, were as nothing in the estimation of the doctor; and he consequently agreed to accompany his wife on her journey only on condition that, after fulfilling all that immediate duty required of him, he should return home immediately.

"Ah!" thought Jessie, "they will get rid of me in this way. I shall be left behind, and he knows how impossible it will be for me to reach home without he comes for me. So they will have all to themselves, without interruption from me."

There was no escape for Jessie—go she must. No pretext presented itself as a sufficient plea for declining to comply with her parents' wishes. Her position was hateful in the extreme; for no single voice said, "Stay;" all said, "Go, and go soon." She did not think it possible she could be ready by the time her husband proposed. Lina ran up stairs with unusual alacrity to help her to pack. Jessie was annoyed beyond endurance. She bit her beautiful lip with her pearly teeth, caught a sight of her dark frowning countenance in the



glass, wondered where all her beauty could have gone, sighed over her failing health, accepted a little refreshment from Mabel's hand, and then, with the assistance of two or three other servants, was made ready for setting off by the next train.

## CHAPTER VII.

JESSIE had not yet become so entirely absorbed in her own feelings as to be insensible to suffering in others ; and the state of things in her father's home affected her deeply. The three years of her married life seemed to have added ten to that of her parents. Her mother, afflicted with a painful rheumatic affection, was now scarcely able to creep from one room to another ; while her father, strangely altered by paralysis, lay in an almost childish condition, though at the same time restless, and requiring in the extreme, and most impatient in demanding whatever object of desire took possession of his little remnant of mind.

It was evident that no attention nor care, not even the common services of kindness, could be rendered to Jessie by either of her parents now ; and she became so alarmed at the prospect of what must be her own position in such a house, that she told her husband he must on no account leave her behind ; and she gladly promised him that, if he only would wait a day or two for her, perhaps not more than a single day, she would return with him to their own home.

The doctor only said in reply that he did not see how his wife could get away so soon, as it would be necessary for him to leave early the following morning ; and to Jessie it was too painfully clear that every one was expecting her to remain, and to remain to *help*, too. This was a fearful look-out for one who never helped



any body, and who required so much help herself; but she consented at last, and with many tears, and many assurances to her husband that she was really unequal to the duty imposed upon her, reluctantly permitted him to depart without her.

The first thing Jessie had set about, after the interchange of mutual kind expressions, was to convince her mother how suffering and ailing she was herself.

"I should scarcely have thought it," replied the old lady. "I should have said you were looking remarkably well."

"That is the worst of it," said Jessie. "My looks are so deceptive. Nobody pities *me*—nobody has the least idea what *I* suffer."

"Well," said the old lady, "I am very sorry for you, for I know what suffering is. I'm sure you have come to a house of suffering. Oh dear, to be caught in every limb as I am. At first it was only this hand; but now it's my leg—and this shoulder—Oh dear, dear!—*and* my back!"

Jessie could not help seeing that her mother's sufferings were at all events more *acute* than her own, but she was quite sure they were not altogether so distressing. Indeed, such was her sensibility to pain, even when only seen, not felt, that she began to fear this spectacle of her mother's spasms of rheumatism would be more than she could bear; and as to doing any thing, or even thinking of any thing to alleviate, that was as entirely out of her province as if she now heard of rheumatism for the first time in her life.

Happily for Jessie there was a very clever and competent nurse in attendance, one of those who know how to take care of themselves, as well as others; and this woman, seeing a fine handsome lady, young and buxom, as it seemed to her, and capable of a good deal of exertion,



take her place in the sick-room in the capacity of daughter, began, very naturally, to think how comfortably this new source of help would relieve her, setting her at liberty sometimes to enjoy a good night's rest, or any other refreshment that she might stand in need of.

So the nurse made much of the old gentleman's wishes, "often and often expressed to her," she said, "in the dead of the night, when he was always clearest, that he might only have his daughter with him, and then he should be happy."

"And yet," observed Jessie, "he does not seem able to converse much."

"The night is the time," said the nurse, in a most emphatic whisper. "If you could only manage, now, just once or so, to sit up—"

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Jessie, "I could not do such a thing for the world."

"I only thought," continued the nurse, "it might have been a comfort afterward to reflect upon. He's not long for this world, poor dear; and you are an only child, I think, ma'am?"

"Yes," said Jessie, a little softened.

"An only child is very precious," observed the nurse, with a very expressive shake of the head, and "parents are parents. People may marry twice, or even three times, and more than that, but they never have neither father nor mother again."

When the nurse had reached this point of pathos, there were signs of her being wanted in the adjoining room, and perhaps she had said as much as prudence dictated for a first experiment.

If Jessie was disappointed to find her father so little capable of any prolonged conversation, she could not be mistaken in the importance he attached to her being near him, nor in the almost childlike affection with which



he insisted upon receiving almost every thing from her hand, as well as in having her so placed in the room that he could see her plainly, even when she was not employed in doing any thing for him. In waiting upon him, Jessie had to be taught by the nurse how to perform the simplest act of service; but as she had always been led on to perform her duties by being praised for doing them, or by seeing how gratefully they were received, so now the evident satisfaction of her father, when she presented his jelly or his cup of broth, so won upon her, that she began almost to find pleasure in the act; only, as she said, and said continually, her strength would never hold out—she was quite sure of that.

There are many expressions applied to denote a certain feminine condition well known in the chamber of sickness, and sometimes found elsewhere. Some call it being “knocked up;” some describe themselves, not less elegantly, as being “upset;” others as “worn out,” and so on; each expression indicating that the complainant has arrived at the extreme end of her capabilities, and so, instead of doing any thing for others, must be attended to herself.

Jessie went through all these, and each time the nurse applied restoratives with such effect that she was able to try again; and really succeeded so well at last, that, under the direction of the nurse, she learned many of those nice arts by which a degree of cheerfulness and comfort is maintained in the sick-room—arts deserving to rank higher than many which society has agreed to call fine arts, because they are, in reality, the finest of all, when tenderly and delicately executed.

The nurse was lavish in her encomiums upon Jessie's proficiency in this new branch of accomplishment. The old man smiled, and evidently appreciated much that was done. The mother lifted up her cramped and swell-



en hands in astonishment that it was Jessie, actually our Jessie! while Jessie herself, to her own unspeakable wonder, became almost cheerful again, and forgot sometimes to brood over those dark, sad thoughts about her home which had lately been her torment.

As a matter of duty, a visitor came to join the little circle about this time, whose presence did not add much to Jessie's satisfaction, because she was wholly incapable of rendering any practical service. It was the old maiden aunt from Bath, her mother's oldest sister, now very old—a sort of maundering creature, who dwelt forever upon bygone times, and puzzled her poor faded brain with trying to make it render up impressions long since worn out.

This little woman it was who had harped so continually upon the name of Thompson—"Dr. Thompson;" and she had not now been long in the house before she caught up the same thread again, saying she thought she could clear it now. But none listened to her, because they had not the slightest faith in her being able to clear any thing.

Jessie had as little patience as any one for these old-world stories; and now especially, when her new occupation began to afford her a certain kind of interest never felt before—now that she began to see a little into the grand mistake of doing nothing, she found it difficult to look with any common degree of respect upon one whose only vocation in life seemed to be a kind of endless twaddle.

It was early enough, certainly, for Jessie to begin to look down upon idle people; yet such was the change effected in her feelings by the little she had already done, that the new stimulus reached even her diseased imagination, and she began to form plans for the future for so distinguishing herself in cleverness and activity, that all



the world should wonder and admire, and her husband more than all.

Jessie's dream was still of admiration—of *appreciation*, she thought it was—and of affection. She could do nothing without being loved. The tenfold happiness of loving had not yet dawned upon her in its true glory. It was the gratitude of her father, and his affectionate expressions, the admiring astonishment of her mother, and, scarcely less than these, the commendations of the nurse upon her skill and cleverness, which kept her up to her work. Whatever might be the stimulus, however, the work itself was good—useful to those around her, most useful to herself.

With all her encomiums, the nurse had not yet been able to accomplish all that she wished, until one day, when Jessie rather reluctantly consented to take a night of watching—just for one night—only, she said, by way of experiment. It might not suit her health—Jessie was sure it would not, for she was by no means a light sleeper, and somewhat addicted to late rising. But an unusual dose of flattery had brought about the desired result, and Jessie was to take charge of the sick-room for the whole of one night.

Adjoining the chamber occupied by the invalid was a kind of ante-room, in which those who were in attendance usually sat, in order that perfect stillness might be maintained in the inner apartment; and here Jessie was surrounded with every thing necessary for her own comfort, as well as every thing likely to be required by the invalid. One want, however, Jessie had not communicated. She would have been ashamed to own it, but she was afraid, absolutely afraid; and she sadly wanted a companion. She knew that she could do very well for a while; but the idea of the awful solitude and stillness of deep night was more than she knew how to bear.



She had provided herself with a novel of the true spasmodic school; yet even that might contain horrors—indeed, it must, and consequently the matter would be made worse.

So when the family had retired to rest, Jessie went stealthily and tapped at the door of the room occupied by her aunt; and, on being permitted to enter, she implored the old lady to come and undress by the fire in the ante-room, promising her a cup of tea, a glass of negus, or any thing, in short, if she would only come.

Overcome by her entreaties, the old lady consented. She would have thought it a pity to miss such an opportunity for the enjoyment of a little quiet chat; so she was soon seated by the fire in the comfortable easy-chair which Jessie vacated for her. In the hope of detaining her guest, Jessie made every demonstration of listening attentively. This was the more necessary, as they had to speak in a kind of subdued tone, lest their voices should penetrate into the adjoining room. It was also necessary for them to be very quiet, in order that they might not miss the slightest sound of a little tinkling hand-bell used by the old gentleman to summon his nurses when he wanted any thing.

Jessie wished she could read her novel while her aunt was talking, but that would scarcely have been respectful. She therefore took up her fancy work, and prepared for endurance.

The little woman was soon upon the old theme—her maid Rebecca, and the story of which she now thought she had been able to grasp every particular. And truly her story was one which might have done almost as well as the novel, had she been able to put its different parts together. It was sufficiently romantic in its details, only that, unfortunately, it was presented to Jessie in a form so disjointed and fragmentary, that her atten-



tion was never really secured, and she failed entirely to apprehend the real drift of the narrative.

It seemed, from the old lady's account, that the uncle of her maid had once assisted at a marriage of a somewhat remarkable description. It was that of a youth of the name of Thompson, with a lady of foreign aspect and manners, much older than himself. There were no relatives or friends in attendance. Indeed, the whole affair was conducted with the utmost privacy, the young man especially being very much afraid that any of his own connections should know of it. In order to secure this secrecy, Rebecca's uncle, who had given the bride away, was made to promise solemnly that he never would disclose what had taken place.

"You say the young man's name was Thompson?" said Jessie, suddenly looking up at this part of the story.

"Yes, I know it was Thompson—of that I am quite clear. He was a doctor, too, or learning to be one, in the family where the lady was a sort of governess, or it might be lady's maid. Nobody knew what she was."

"Quite a romance," said Jessie, laughing. "Pray what was the lady's name?"

"There, I am sorry to say, I am at fault," replied the narrator. "I can not recall it, if, indeed, I ever rightly heard. An Italian, I think she was, or French—I really don't know which; only a foreigner I am almost sure she was, or pretended to be, and her first name I remember very well was Angelina."

"More romantic still," said Jessie. "And what did they do after their marriage? Live on love, I suppose."

"They kept it secret a good while, until at last both disappeared together; and a great talk there was about it at the time. Rebecca says all Bath was up. But, like other wonders, I suppose it died away."



“And what then?”

“Rebecca’s uncle had to leave his place in consequence, and set up for himself in business at a small place somewhere in that neighborhood. I can not think what the name of that place was. Dear me! I had it not a minute ago.”

“Oh! never mind the place. Tell me something more about my namesake, Mr. Thompson. Do you know any thing more?”

“Yes. Some three years afterward, Rebecca’s uncle was written to by the young man to ask if his wife—for he was married then—could take charge of a little child whose mother was dead.”

“Upon my word, aunt, you ought to put your story together, and make a three-volume novel of it. I never heard any thing better; and then that charming name—I mean the foreign lady’s.”

“Angelina?”

“Yes, you could never beat that. You say she died?”

“She did. It was but a miserable kind of match, as you may suppose. A selfish, scheming woman they say she was. Most foreigners, you know, are.”

“Well?”

“Nay, I don’t know that there is much more to tell. The thing has quite blown over now, they say, and nobody seems to know any thing about it in Bath.”

“They will know when your novel comes out,” said Jessie, laughing.

“Well, as the name was Thompson, I thought you might like to hear all about it.”

“Oh yes, thank you, aunt. I like it very much. But now, don’t you want your negus? You shall see how well I can make it for you. There is nobody who can do these things better than I can now.”



Jessie made the negus rather strong; and, by the time the old lady had sipped to the bottom of her glass, her eyes were so weighed down with sleep, that Jessie thought it best to prop her head with a pillow, wrap her in a warm shawl, and let her remain in the easy-chair by the fire for the remainder of the night.

The old lady slept rather uneasily, but still she slept; and thus the long night wore away without Jessie's feeling quite so lonely as she had anticipated. She had been a little beguiled by the minuteness of her aunt's long story, for it was drawn out so as to be very long; but she thought no more of it in the morning, when every one was kindly inquiring about how she felt, and how she had borne the unwonted privation of a sleepless night. This was quite an event to Jessie, and she dwelt upon it with great complacency, as if she had performed some remarkable feat or act of heroism, which invested her with both interest and importance.

The enjoyment which Jessie derived from this source was a little damped by the arrival of letters that day. Her enjoyment was always damped when she thought of home, and of herself, in what she considered her neglected condition there. To-day, however, there was something really to be concerned about, for her husband's letter told of the spread of the fever, of his own exertions by night and day, and of fears which he entertained that some cases near home should assume the character of typhus. All this he wrote in a hurried, irregular manner, concluding with an earnest, an almost imperative charge, that his wife would not think of returning until he should pronounce it to be safe.

Many thoughts flashed across Jessie's mind as she read this letter. What if her husband should catch the fever? What if it should be all a contrivance to keep her away? She became restless, agitated—knew not



what to think. The only relief from present suffering which she could devise was to set off home immediately. She forgot that she had been up all night—forgot her aunt's story—forgot her father even. At last she decided to await the next day's post, and in the mean time to do the only wise thing that remained to her—to try to get a little rest.

For this purpose Jessie retired to her room, shut herself in, drew down the blinds, and made all as dark and secluded as she could. But there was no sleep for her—no rest. Great waves of thought kept rushing in upon her like the waves of the sea after a storm, some bringing fragments of wreck, some bitter weeds, and some the terrible evidence of death having been at work under the most frightful and appalling circumstances.

In the midst of this hurry of thought and confusion of feelings, one impression remained clear to Jessie—that if her husband should be ill she *must* go home, whatever he might say, or direct to be said, to the contrary. She could leave her parents now with the utmost propriety. Her father remained very much in the state in which she had found him—he might continue the same for a considerable time: no immediate change was apprehended now. Besides which, she wanted to be at home; and with a sudden gush of tenderness, which brought tears to her eyes, Jessie buried her face in the pillow, and at last wept herself to sleep.

On the following morning a letter was given to Jessie, the handwriting of which she did not recognize. It was like a school-girl's—yes, it was Lina's—very short, and evidently written in secret on her own responsibility.

“I think it right to tell you,” she said in the letter, “that the doctor is very ill. He does not want you to come, because he is so afraid you should take the fever; and, indeed, many people have it all around us—some



very severely, and some are dead. The doctor has worked very hard, both night and day; but he does not leave his bed now, and Dr. Jordon, who comes to see him very often, tells us it is the fever. He says himself it is a very mild attack, and that he shall soon be out again. It may be so; but still I thought I ought to let you know. So pray forgive me if I have done wrong."

Jessie lost not a moment in hesitation. She could pack without help now, or do any thing else that was necessary. Her countenance showed that she was in heavy trouble, though she spoke few words, and none of distress; and there was once more light in her eye, and clearness on her brow, because she was right now—all right; and she took leave of her parents, and set out on her journey alone, with that perfect calmness which becomes habitual with those who accustom themselves to do right, and only right.

## CHAPTER VIII.

JESSIE accomplished her journey home without ever being aware of its difficulties. Indeed, there were no real difficulties to encounter; but the length of time it required, and the hours which had necessarily to elapse before she could ascertain the real state of things at home, were all the annoyance of which she was sensible. When, at last, she reached her own door, the astonishment of the servants was extreme; and they looked, indeed, as if half disposed not to admit her into the house, so unfit a person did they evidently consider her to enter where there were sickness and trouble.

That may truly be called a melancholy state of things where the mistress of a house is received back into her place as an additional trouble, rather than a help. Jessie felt this in all its humiliation, for she had been growing



proud of her recently developed capabilities; and she was always eager to reap the credit of what she could do, even before it was done.

The servants said they had the strictest orders not to let any one enter the doctor's room, except those who had been there from the first.

"And who has been there?" asked Jessie.

"The nurse, and—"

"And who?"

"Why, Miss, to be sure," said Mabel, always predisposed to speak. "Some people must always be throwing themselves in the way, and getting into danger, and then having to be nursed and taken care of."

But Jessie was gone—out of hearing of these familiar-sounding words, which, to do her justice, she was not wanting to hear now. Going first into her own room, and disengaging herself from all outside wrappings, she next stole silently into the chamber which her husband had chosen to occupy, as being most detached from other parts of the house. Here all was so still that she felt almost afraid to enter. The ear of the sick man was, however, quick to catch every sound, and with his hand he put back the curtain of the bed as Jessie entered.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "you should not have come. But it is over now;" and, with a pleased expression stealing over his pale face, he stretched out both his arms, and clasped his wife to his bosom.

"Fool that I am!" said he, almost pushing her away, the next moment—"worse than fool! Oh! Jessie, why did you come?"

"I came to nurse you," she replied.

"You!" And the doctor actually laughed, for he had no very exalted idea of his wife's nursing. "Well, they must take care of you," he said, "for I am but a poor creature just now."



"I am afraid," said Jessie, "there is but little chance of your being better for some time yet."

"Not for some days," said her husband, "certainly. But you see I am taking it very easily. I hardly think I need have kept in bed at all, only for the sake of example, and because I go about preaching to others."

"We shall see," said Jessie, "how you get on afterward. I fancy that is often the greatest trial."

"You!" said the doctor again, very much disposed to laugh. "What do *you* know about it? It is worth something, though, to have you to look at. But, for goodness' sake, take care and observe faithfully all that I tell you."

Here the doctor began to prescribe with great minuteness, telling Jessie of so many precautions to be observed for the preservation of that precious life of hers, that she grew tired of listening, and turned to other subjects, for she wanted to hear of much that had transpired during her absence.

So deeply had Jessie been interested in the one absorbing anxiety which had brought her home, that she had scarcely bestowed even common attention upon Lina, who was seated in the room when she first entered, but rose and went out almost immediately. Something struck Jessie, just in a passing way, like unusual paleness in the girl's face; but she said nothing about it until an hour afterward, when, in an interview with Mabel, she learned that "Miss had fancied herself poorly for the last day or two, but—"

"I suppose she can take the fever as well as others," said Jessie.

"Fee-ver!" said Mabel, with a look of ineffable contempt. It is strange how such people will not let any one be poorly whom they dislike. "She's got no fever. It's only with being up at nights, and creeping forever



in and out of master's room. And yet she's good for nothing when she is there, nurse says—nothing in the world, no more than a babby."

But Jessie was not disposed just now for continuing this kind of colloquy, and the disappointed Mabel went down stairs, murmuring to herself as she went, "Mercy on us! The world's all turned upside down, it seems to me. What's to come next, I wonder?"

Although Jessie would not listen to what her servant had to say, there was still the same voice within her own heart, to which she listened as before; and this voice now whispered, that another had usurped her place while she was absent; had been admitted to her husband's presence while he was keeping her away; and had been wasting her strength in his service, so far as she knew how, while she was looking, as she saw in her glass, unscathed, unruffled, and, if she would have owned it, as fine a specimen of health as any eye could desire to gaze upon. Surely there was work to be got out of that vigorous frame yet—something like service to the human family—something like help for the wants and the woes now gathering thickly around her.

On the following morning Lina was missed from her accustomed place—first in the doctor's room, before the dim light of morning had disturbed any other of the household. He was himself the first to observe this, and sent the nurse to look after her. The nurse reported that she was quite well—only thought, as Mrs. Thompson had returned, there was no need for her to come into the room.

This sounded rather strange, and the doctor was not satisfied. Yet whom could he send to ascertain the truth? Blind as he generally was to most of what lay beneath the surface of his domestic life, he could not be wholly insensible to the prejudice prevailing against this



girl, nor quite unaware that, when women are prejudiced, they lose their natural quickness of apprehension on the side of sickness or suffering. Most certainly he could not ask his wife to ascertain this delicate point for him. So he was compelled to wait, and he did so with the less impatience, that his own illness was increasing upon him, and threatening to overpower all other anxieties in the one grievous apprehension to him, that he should become totally disqualified for taking any part in those public measures which the state of the jail and the neighborhood rendered so important at the present time.

But if the slender figure of the pale girl did not steal into the doctor's room as usual that morning, to whisper to the nurse her anxious inquiries about how he had spent the night, there was another step—a most unexpected one—scarcely perceptible, though it came many times during the night like the visitations of a spirit, or like something in a dream. And the patient thought, now and then, that he had been only dreaming; for the face that peeped past the curtain was so like his wife's, and yet it was so unlikely that she should break her rest, and risk her health to come. He little knew that sleep never once visited her eyes that night, that her pillow was scarcely pressed, that strange thoughts were too busy with her brain for sleep, and new feelings too busy with her heart for repose.

Jessie had seen what she did not allow herself to express in words—how ill her husband really was. He would not acknowledge it to her, but he knew that the worst stage of the fever was rapidly approaching, and that he might soon lose the power of conversing with her in any rational or collected manner. Yet he seemed to have nothing to say—nothing but little playful expressions of affection, such as thus far in her experience Jessie had been only too well pleased to hear. Now,



however, she was sensible of a change in herself, no less than in her circumstances. She wanted now to be something more to her husband than a child—a toy. She wanted, in fact, to get at the real heart of the man—to know what life actually was to him, and death. She did not want to be forever dallying on the surface of both, as it seemed to her now that her whole past had been.

In order to penetrate this surface, Jessie would gladly have taken her place beside her husband, and sat there until some opening should occur for speaking more earnestly than she was accustomed to speak; but ever as she felt impelled to do this, there rushed into her mind the strange mystery about that girl—for a mystery she was now sure there was—a secret, something kept purposely from her, yet understood by them both. And how, she asked herself with burning cheeks and flashing eyes—she asked herself, as she had done a thousand times before, how should there be a secret unless a guilty secret? Her husband's character she acknowledged to be, both in public and private, most unlike that of a guilty man. Lina, too, looked innocent almost to a fault; but then the doctor had lived a long life before she knew him, and seldom if ever spoke to her of the past; and as to the girl's innocence, those seeming angels were always the worst deceivers.

Oh, how Jessie hated herself for these thoughts, which still, among all her better aspirations, rushed in upon her soul, and poisoned all the spring's tenderness for others, and of hope for herself! She hated herself with a peculiar hatred that night, and went again and again into her husband's room, with a vague idea that something might perhaps transpire to enable her to strip off at once and forever whatever was deceptive or unreal in her present condition, so that she might see and know the worst.



Each time, however, Jessie had seen that her husband was very ill—she thought increasingly ill—and she had shrunk from interrupting that stillness and quiet, which the doctors who attended him had insisted upon as most important to his recovery. The present was certainly no time for introducing any agitating subject; yet, if the fever should increase, and delirium ensue? If—There were contingencies involved in these inquiries of a nature too agonizing to be contemplated; and thus it was that Jessie remained sleepless and unsatisfied throughout the whole night, not knowing—scarcely daring to think what might be before her—not fully anticipating the worst, yet so conscious of being in no way prepared to meet it, that the bare idea of what was even possible under existing circumstances sent a chill and a horror through her whole frame, which made her go again into her husband's room to give one more look, in order to reassure herself that he was still living and in the possession of his senses.

Jessie had never spoken all through the night, either to the patient or the nurse. When the morning came she saw for herself that the disease was making progress. A physician—a friend of her husband's—called early, but did not say much about his opinion of the case; for such was the general impression respecting Jessie that no one looked upon her as a woman to be dealt with openly and rationally. Her calm and intelligent look, when spoken to by this gentleman, might certainly have justified a different opinion; but for this time, at least, he went away without speaking in any definite manner respecting her husband's real state.

Toward noon that day there began to be a general wonder throughout the house that Lina did not make her appearance, and at last Jessie went into her room to see for herself what could be the cause. The girl



scarcely spoke in answer to any inquiries about herself, but asked with eager interest about the doctor. She wanted nothing, she said, and persisted in calling herself quite well and comfortable, but she made no attempt to get up, and Jessie observed a strange darkness about her eyes, which looked hollow and sunk, as well as a changed appearance, altogether beyond what she thought could be accounted for by only one night's indisposition.

Jessie consulted the nurse; but the woman, tainted with the prejudice of the kitchen, said she had observed nothing, and thought, if only the young lady would get up and exert herself, it would be seen that very little was the matter with her. "There was so much in giving way."

"Not in a case of typhus fever," Jessie thought; and she began now very seriously to fear that she should soon have two cases upon her hands of no ordinary responsibility; for, though the girl could be nothing to her personally, it was impossible to get rid of the conviction that, in proportion as she was slighted by others, or only grudgingly supplied with common attention, she would become to herself a serious and peculiar charge, with no mingling of affection to give tenderness or interest to the duties from which there was no escape.

In proportion as Jessie's cares increased, the power of communicating with her husband, so as to obtain aid from his judgment and experience, diminished. Already it had become unsuitable to call his attention to any question requiring thought. Jessie fancied sometimes he was ill at ease, in mind as well as body. She observed that he looked every now and then inquiringly about the room; yet, while she guessed the meaning of these indications of anxiety, she felt afraid to break that spell of silence and reserve which had lately enveloped one par-



ticular subject between her husband and herself, by so much as appearing to understand what was harassing his mind. If he chose to speak, well and good; but if he wished her still to stand aloof, a stranger to his inmost feelings, she could do so—yes, even to the hour of death. What woman can not?

So there was no intimate or close communication even now—only thanks on the part of the husband for attentions kindly rendered by the wife, with a little flattering pleasantry now and then; but no allusion to his real state—no charge in case of fatal termination—no treatment of his wife as if she was really a comfort and a help—no mention of that past, nor of that future beyond the grave, which, whether now or distant, must await them both.

Jessie would have given worlds to be able or permitted to speak on some of these subjects, which pressed upon her now so heavily that her very heart was aching for utterance; but where such themes have never been discussed with grave interest between man and wife in time of health—when a barrier has consequently grown up between them and the mutual expression of all feeling on such points, it is not likely that the barrier should be broken down on a sick-bed; neither would the letting in such a mighty, but long pent-up river be always appropriate at such a time.

So the keen, searching eyes went wandering round the room, though the parched lips never spoke; and Jessie sat still and wondering, almost paralyzed at times with awe and dread; for she saw that the dim curtain was being let down over her husband's mind, that his faculties were becoming in a slight degree disordered, and she could not but feel it was quite possible he might never be able to speak to her rationally again.

How different was her position now from what it



would have been had she ever fully shared her husband's confidence, and fully known his heart! There is something ennobling—something which bears the weak spirit up by its own intrinsic greatness, in the situation of a wife who has been a true helpmeet—a real sharer in her husband's heart and life—a faithful adviser in his temporal concerns—a still more faithful friend—alternate child to learn, and counselor to instruct, in all matters of spiritual and eternal interest. There is something almost grand, though terrible, and very sweet amid all its agony, in the situation of a wife who thus waits by the sick-bed of her husband to receive, it may be, the whole burden of that responsibility which hitherto she has only shared, yet shared so nobly that she feels, with God's help, a certain lowly sense of capability for sustaining it even alone in its full measure of importance. And thus, because it has been his, for his sake she takes the great burden up, rejecting no single portion which he thought worthy of being borne; but rather gathering into her weak arms all the vast amount, jealous lest any single duty, however trivial in appearance, should escape, and so be left undone.

How can a husband leave his wife a more precious legacy than this, making her his true executor, intrusted with the carrying out of his will in all things wherein his honor or his principles have been most concerned?

And nobly indeed have women of all ranks and circumstances often discharged this sacred trust—weak women becoming strong by the greatness of their work—sorrowing women becoming cheerful with the joy of performing it aright—lowly women becoming wise under the manifold requirements of what they have to do—good women becoming holy in the sanctity which death has imparted to every motive and to every act.



## CHAPTER IX.

JESSIE had none of these higher consolations to bear her up—consolations which belong to the exalted position just described. She had, however, active duty, which is no mean solace, only that in her case it was an experiment tried too late, and consequently productive of but a small portion of the satisfaction with which it is sometimes attended.

No one who had only seen Jessie in her indulged and idle state could have believed her to be the same person who now went, with unhesitating step, from room to room, even where danger to herself was most imminent—shrinking from nothing, escaping from no privation—actually taking her place before the nurse in promptness and decision, and scarcely behind her in management and resource. For Jessie, half in play and half in vanity, had been learning her lesson well, though little dreaming for what purpose the teaching was intended. She had found new faculties, new powers, new strength, while attending upon her father, where she looked every moment for encouragement and praise; and now, where there was neither, she worked as effectually, or more so, because there was a certain consolation in action—the only one, in fact, which her situation afforded; and partly because, in one case at least, her own happiness, almost her very life was bound up with the life she was struggling to preserve.

It might well be excused to Jessie that she confined her own personal attentions almost exclusively to her husband, sending the hired attendants most frequently into the room where Lina now lay insensible. The doc-



tors had deemed it right to tell Jessie their opinion of this case, which was decidedly unfavorable. But just at the time they did so her husband appeared to be so ill, that their words made little impression; and besides, what was that girl to her in comparison? Any one might take charge of her; but to leave a single moment—perhaps some lucid interval—some look of recognition—some word of tenderness on the part of her husband, seemed to Jessie now a loss too great to be endured.

Two or three times a day, however, she went hastily into the room where the poor girl lay. Here she just saw that order was maintained, charged the nurses to be punctual in observing all medical directions—observed, perhaps, during a moment or two, how the poor unconscious creature lay and breathed, and then hurried back to her husband, without one additional pang of real distress at the spectacle she had witnessed.

Lina was, indeed, most seriously ill. She had been ailing for many days previous to Jessie's return. The doctor had observed that she leaned her head upon her arms, as if it ached or felt heavy; and although, when he questioned her, she assumed a brighter expression of countenance, and said she was quite well, it was impossible for his practiced eye not to detect the lurking symptoms of disease. Perhaps the most agitating thoughts which haunted his pillow, before his mind became confused, might relate to her. He kept these, however, locked as usual within his own breast. By degrees even this reality faded among others, becoming mixed up with the strange creatures of a distempered fancy. Not that he was affected in any violent manner. He was more confused than positively delirious, and lay for some days and nights incapable of collected thought or continued conversation. At least, so it seemed to Jessie, who watched him narrowly; but there might be



gleams of thought which he never communicated to her, and apprehensions of a nature too acute for words.

However this might be, Jessie knew nothing beyond what she saw. She might almost be said to care for nothing but to know that with her husband the worst was past, so intense had become her anxiety during the critical stage of his illness. This most welcome fact was at length announced to her by the medical gentleman in attendance, who added to his cheering intelligence a few hints respecting the condition of the younger patient, which were far from encouraging. He even ventured to ask, on the following day, if she had any parents or near relatives, who ought to be informed in case of danger. At which inquiry Jessie blushed deeply, replying only that the young lady was an orphan, her husband's ward.

"I only thought," said the doctor, "that in case of her guardian being incapable of discharging such a duty, it might devolve on some one else."

Jessie became more embarrassed; but the doctor, anxious only to discharge what devolved upon him, turned away, without appearing to notice any thing beyond his immediate duty, and in all probability thought no more on the subject, for there was business to be done just then, in and about the town of Larchfield, sufficiently onerous to distract all attention from those little matters of ordinary gossip, in which it is scarcely to be supposed that even the medical staff are, in times of leisure, wholly unconcerned.

There are very few eagerly anticipated moments of relief that bring with them all the gladness they were expected to afford. With the joy of again believing that her husband's life was safe, Jessie experienced a return of many painful feelings connected with that secret which had so sadly interfered with her domestic peace.

If this poor girl should now be really sinking—pass-



ing, as it seemed, under her very eyes, rapidly on toward the borders of the grave—might not that mystery be explained? Ought she not to try the effect of an appeal to the girl herself? What! and stand a humiliated woman before her, confessedly ignorant of her husband's secrets, shut out from his confidence, and subordinate to some other unknown influence, which she had to ask as a favor that a stranger would explain? No; she could never endure that. So Jessie remained silent still, though she went oftener into the sick-room, and sometimes remained there longer; for a kind of gloomy awe crept about her heart while there, which held her chained to the spot, even when she wished to be away.

Jessie saw plainly that a great change had come over the countenance of the girl; and miserable as her living presence had often made her, there was something in the prospect of her death which made her more miserable still. Indeed, all was gloom and darkness now, as well as mystery. There was no kind interchange of feeling to soften under suffering, or to sustain through the discharge of arduous duty; for, while Jessie took care that all personal services were rendered, and although she herself began almost to haunt the room, so often was she stealing in on tiptoe or listening at the door, she never stooped down, with tender interest, to whisper a word of hope or comfort, or showed any other evidence of feeling than might have been called forth in the wards of a common hospital.

Though perfectly sensible, the doctor was still too weak to be spoken to on any subject of anxiety. Jessie dared not even communicate to him what the physician had said respecting that more serious case which now occupied so much of her attention. Her lips were sealed, but her heart beat heavily as she passed from room to room, dreading, each time she entered Lina's, that she might witness some fearful change.



The girl, she believed, was sensible, but so silent that it was impossible to form any idea of what might be passing in her mind. Sometimes her eyes followed Jessie with a look of intense anxiety, as if she wanted to speak, but could not. More than once she had uttered a hasty request that Jessie might be asked to come to her; but when she came, said nothing—only looked. Jessie knew not how to bear the fascination of those eyes—so clear, so penetrating—which now looked full into hers, and seemed as if searching down into her very soul. At times they were so tender, too; and that expression was the worst of all to bear, when they were fixed upon her face with a soft, earnest, longing gaze, until tears began to dim their sight, and then the eyelids closed, and all was still as death.

Jessie became more interested than she wished to be. If the girl should really die, the world would be no poorer, Jessie thought; and surely she herself was not chargeable with her soul. It might be well to send for a clergyman. She did so, and still the same burden remained upon her heart—the same fascination still led her steps continually into the room—still riveted her feet to the spot when she was there.

“I wish she had a mother,” said Jessie to herself, “or some one I could send for to be kinder to her than these servants are. She seems to want kindness. I wonder whether she has ever known much of it.”

In this manner Jessie sat and pondered to herself in silence, while fast the moments flew—the last precious moments in which it would be possible to speak. Ah! there are some of us who speak too often, and too much; but are there not death-beds which tell sad tidings of too little having been said while there was strength to speak, and time and opportunity to profit by what should have been said, but never was?



The case of this poor girl, though now considered hopeless, was more lingering than might have been expected. Servants and nurses were all worn out, and some were affected with the same malady themselves. Jessie, among others, might well have pleaded need of rest; for she was now living and watching in that strange, unnatural state which seems to be maintained almost by miracle, and as if for some especial object, which it is only prolonged for the purpose of carrying out. In this state it was that she undertook, on one occasion, the night watching with Lina, in order that the other attendants might enjoy the benefit of rest. Her husband was not to know of it, for he had already begun to evince a wondering kind of anxiety at seeing Jessie so much about; and not having yet arrived at any rational apprehension of the true state of the case, nor how much his wife was altered both in feeling and in capability, he had given strict directions to the nurse who attended in his room that Jessie should be carefully watched, and all arrangements made so that her nightly rest should never be disturbed.

For this reason it was that Jessie chose to keep her sitting up that night with Lina a secret; and, as there was no longer need for much night watching with her husband, every member of the household was permitted to retire to rest.

With the disappearance of one attendant after another, and the general hush and stillness of the house as they went to their several quarters, Jessie felt a kind of awe steal over her, which was much increased by the already exhausted state of her own powers, and that nervous excitement which is almost inseparable from such a condition. At such times, every sound and every movement, however insignificant in itself, seems to be fraught with meaning, which the imagination interprets instead of the



reason; and in Jessie's situation especially there were many causes which combined to render it one of peculiar solemnity, if not of absolute terror. First among these was the absence of all freedom of communication. The two beings who occupied that room were as entirely strangers to each other as if they had never met before. They both knew that the great curtain which separates time from eternity was about to be withdrawn—they both waited, as it were, for the first uplifting of that awful veil, and yet neither spoke to the other, nor asked if light was dawning from beyond, nor wished God-speed along the dark valley which must so soon be passed.

Silence, deep and unbroken, reigned throughout the house—such silence as comes with the heavy sleep of those who have watched until exhausted nature is wearied out. Jessie felt as if she was the only being actually alive beneath that roof, except the one beside her, whose breathing might almost at any moment cease.

When Jessie took leave of her husband for the night, he had said he thought he should sleep; and there was every reason to hope that the night would be to him one of natural and refreshing repose. So to whatever height the vividness of Jessie's imaginings might rise, or whatever form her fears might assume short of the actual approach of death, she felt that her husband must not be appealed to, lest the chance of this night's wholesome and necessary refreshment should be lost. Alone, then, she was, and must be; and the dead silence even of the midnight hours she must endure as best she could.

Whatever fatigue or suffering Jessie had experienced up to this time, loneliness, utter loneliness, had never been among her trials. Indeed, with her husband there had always been some pretense to conversation, though it might be at distant intervals, and some appearance of familiar recognition, even when no words were spoken.



But here there was such strangeness—such entire separation of heart from heart—such mystery—*that* was the worst aspect of the case; for Jessie could not help still pondering over vague possibilities, and chances of things being true which yet were scarcely possible. Glad indeed would she have been to find only a temporary resource from the busy working of her brain in reading. But the power to forget herself in a book was no longer at her command. Her senses were too vivid for that—the whirl of thought too rapid and confused.

Many times during the night Jessie started at what she fancied was a sudden movement of the curtains of the bed; but, on looking round, all was again still, only that those eyes were staring—staring full upon her. She could not sustain that mesmeric kind of influence which seemed to pass from them to her; so she changed her place, and sat where the eyes could not reach her. Here she had to stretch out her neck and peep, if she wanted to see any one in the bed, and every time she did so the idea of meeting those eyes filled her with a new horror. At last she determined not to look at all. If any thing was wanted she could not fail to know, and the watch on the table would indicate when medicine must be given.

So Jessie sat a long time in such profound stillness, that the ticking of the watch was all the sound she heard. When suddenly—she could not be mistaken now—the curtain did actually move. She heard the rustling of the folds, and, looking toward the bed, she saw a thin white arm and hand, with poor, lean fingers, raised, and beckoning as if for her to go nearer to the bed.

Trembling all over with a kind of indefinite terror, Jessie rose and approached where the arm kept waving with something, she thought, like the convulsive movement of expiring nature. She thought there was also an attempt to speak, and she stooped down that she might catch the words.



"Is any one there?" said Lina, with a frightened look, and in a hollow kind of whisper.

"No," said Jessie; "I am alone."

"May I speak to you?"

"Yes; I wish you would."

"*Do* you wish I would?"

"Yes; that has often been my wish."

"Has it? Oh, has it? Well, then, take hold of my hand, will you? Ah, how soft and warm yours is—how beautiful you are! But I must make haste. I have something to tell you. Surely *he* won't be angry if I tell you?"

"Who?"

"He—my father."

"Who?"

"He is my father—I am his child."

Jessie uttered a shriek so loud and piercing, that, but for the heavy sleep of those tired watchers, it must have brought some of them into the room; and immediately sinking down upon her knees beside the bed, she covered her face with her hands, and groaned aloud, "Too late! too late! Why did he never tell me?" were the cruel thoughts which wrung this anguish from her soul.

The thin hand dropped down upon her neck, and there the trembling fingers seemed to play and quiver among the thick tresses of her hair. Poor little helpless fingers—fond, even now! Poor empty hand, that never found another hand to clasp!

Ah! in that agonizing moment what floods of thought rushed like a tempest through Jessie's mind! And among all was that just indignation against wrong toward herself which seemed to turn her tears to fire. The keen, quick sense of what she might have been, of what she believed that she should have been under different treatment—the sense of cruel loss, as if she had been



robbed of the best portion of her life and of herself—these strong passionate feelings first awoke, and for a while shut out the nobler sense of what she ought to have done and been, in spite of circumstances.

And all the while one of those little hands was on her neck, the other grasped in hers. It was too late now. The womanly heart should have warmed toward the helpless creature before. Womanly pity, so seldom wanting, should have opened the floodgates of mutual confidence. What might not then have followed? Perhaps a love as close and tender as the estrangement had been distant and cold. What might not have been comprehended, too, in such a love? Sister and child, mother and friend—all that to both had been so sadly wanting—all that would have come like the sweet atmosphere of a better life to both.

Too late indeed! For death was waiting at the door of that young and closely-folded heart, ready to snatch the precious bud away unopened. Those long-sealed lips were losing the power of utterance now. A shadow was stealing over those pale features, on which the sunshine of life had all too rarely fallen. Yet with a strange kind of animation, not unfrequently the immediate prelude of the spirit's flight, the poor girl asked to be raised, and to have more air, in order that she might speak.

In the act of raising her head Jessie saw how very near the final change was coming. She did not think, at that moment, of communicating with her husband. She did not wish for help, and the two remained alone. Half supporting the feeble figure in her arms, she could hear every word, however faintly uttered; and she found there was a painful struggle to say more than it was possible to utter.

“I wish I could speak for you,” said Jessie kindly.



"He will tell you all," said the feeble voice—"my father. Ah! if I might but have called you mother—elder sister—only something dear!"

"I would have been all that to you," said Jessie, "if I had but known."

"I wish you would have let me love you," said the poor girl, her weak arms trying to clasp Jessie's neck. "I did so want somebody to love."

"You only show me what I have lost," exclaimed Jessie, unable to bear this innocent reproach. "May God forgive me, and have mercy on my soul!"

"That is the prayer for me," said the girl. "May God forgive *me*! Do you think he will?"

"I believe him to be all-merciful."

"But you say it is too late."

"Too late with me, but not with God. With him it never is too late while there are life and feeling left."

"I wish you would pray for me."

"My child! I am a sinful creature, not fit to pray for you."

"Oh! call me your child again. I wish I was your child. I could have loved you so!"

"Ah! but there is One to love and think of now, who can be more to you, even yet, than I could ever have been through long, long years."

"I know whom you mean—Jesus, the blessed Savior."

"It is of Him I want you to think."

"I have been thinking of Him—perhaps dreaming—I don't quite know how it was; but such a glorious sight I saw, and such a voice I heard! The words I can not tell: all I remember clearly is, '*What thou doest, do quickly!*' So I beckoned you to come, that I might tell you all, for I knew it was right that you should be told. And now, if he, my father, should be angry, tell him it



was his child's last act of duty to him and you—perhaps the only really good act she ever did. But what is this? You are weeping! Is it for me?"

"Perhaps for us both."

"Nay, never weep for me. I am only like a stray flower—a weed that stole into your garden. I should never have been worth much to you. At least, I suppose not, for I never have been to any body. Only I know I *could* have loved you—oh, so tenderly!—if you would have let me. But we won't speak of that now. I want to look into your eyes a little, and to feel your arm under me. Is it under me? Oh! hold me up—I'm going! Now pray—*do* pray, and let me die so."

Jessie knew not what she said. She never thought of words; but if ever a true heart-appeal was wrung from human voice hers had that claim, at least, to being heard. Once having found utterance for those feelings which have no real language but in prayer, she could say kind, cheering words of hope as well as love, which fell sweetly on the failing senses of the dying girl, though she only responded by a closer embrace, until at length the clasp of the feeble hands relaxed, and, as the head sank quietly back, Jessie saw that the dimness of death was stealing over the eyes, and that the last struggle of expiring nature would soon be over.

Happily there *was* no struggle—only increasing faintness, and a lingering look from the darkened countenance which could not be mistaken. Jessie felt unable to move away until all should be over; but she wished now that her husband could be called, and turning her head to see whether any means were at hand by which the inmates of the house might be summoned, she saw, half way between the door and the bed a figure standing—a tall white figure, which might well have been mistaken for some spiritual messenger, waiting for the



departure of the soul just liberated from its earthly bonds.

Jessie expressed no alarm. So deep a sense of awe had been within and around her as scarcely could have been increased by any visitation from the spiritual world. She knew, however, in another moment, that it was her husband who stood beside her. He alone of all the household had heard the shriek which Jessie uttered; and, supposing it to have been caused by some alarming manifestation of the near approach of death, he had risen in his weak state, and throwing over him what he could first lay hold of, had crept with feeble and almost silent steps into the room at the time when his wife was kneeling by the bed, and burying her face in the clothes.

The first words which struck his ear convinced him that his secret had been told. The agony of his wife, the earnestness of the dying girl, the consciousness in his own mind of the wrong course he had been pursuing, all combined to arrest his steps; and he remained like one paralyzed, unable to speak or move; but in this condition receiving, deeply impressed upon his soul, the full meaning of that most touching scene which owed its poignant agony almost entirely to him.

Too late! too late! How did his heart respond to those sad words, and what would he not at that moment have given to recall the past—to receive back again into his bosom those who had been committed to him—wife and child—without a cloud between them—without a secret in his heart or home!

That struggle of expiring nature, which Jessie had at one time so much feared, was not permitted to shake the tender frame of the dying girl. The spirit passed with no more painful evidence of its departure than gently suspended breath. Not even in the sudden shock of beholding her husband so unexpectedly had Jessie relin-



quished her hold of the sinking form. But all was over now, and as she quietly laid down the head, adjusted the hair, and smoothed the pillow, she felt her husband's arm steal round her; and although neither husband nor wife could utter a single word, they were soon enfolded in an embrace which afforded the best omen of entire reconciliation.

Estrangement such as theirs, however, and wrong, and secrecy—which in married life is, perhaps, the greatest wrong—was not to be overcome by one embrace. That pale and now senseless figure, with her young face prematurely withered like a young flower-bud which ungenial airs and cloudy skies have never permitted to expand—that crushed heart, now still forever, which they should have warmed and cherished, and done their best to feed with the bread of life—that form was at once the dumb witness of their true repentance, and the solemn pledge of a future to them which should never have to be repented of.

But there was the world to meet again—perhaps more difficult still, they had each other to meet—to meet face to face with true heart and earnest purpose, and, so far as possible, with entire forgetfulness of the past. All this would have to be the work of time. Ah! if we could only act our virtues out as we design them, in a moment, by the bed of death, or while some great agony is transpiring, and shrouding like the passing tempest all minor things in obscurity. It is on the morrow that the trial comes, or the day after, when neighbors have dropped in, and little speeches have been made, and curious questions asked, and when distorted fragments of the world's opinion have come round us again like bees when the sun shines forth after a shower, each armed with little stings and tiny globules of sharp venom.

It is not to be supposed that through these after-days



all things went smoothly with Jessie and her husband. In common honesty it ought, perhaps, to be confessed that Jessie, woman-like, would have her say — would, once for all, speak out touching the injury and wrong her husband had done her in excluding her from his confidence, even while he seemed to love her. More than once she even ventured to describe such love as little worth, and would insist upon his believing how much wiser and better as a woman she would have been under more rational and worthy treatment; while, on the other hand, he, man-like, retorted by saying that she had never interested herself, nor read his books, nor followed his pursuits, nor, in short, evinced any other desire than to be admired, and loved, and cared for. In this respect he had not failed—indeed, he had denied her nothing.

Sweet consolation that—to have been *denied nothing!* But every one knows too well what can be said on such occasions. With Jessie and her husband the upbraidings were few, the bitterness of short duration. They had each learned a lesson which life might be too short to practice. The precious time, perhaps too short to be redeemed, they could not afford to waste. The ground they had mutually lost must be recovered by an earnestness which admitted of no trifling; and especially that confidence, for the want of which their happiness had been so nearly wrecked, must now be preserved with a solicitude which no passing moment or event should ever divert from its legitimate object.

In order to establish this confidence on a sure foundation, no time was lost in making Jessie acquainted with those circumstances which had thrown a veil of mystery over her married lot. With a clear conscience and an open brow, her husband told her all. He might have told her all at first. There was nothing more criminal than an early, ill-judged, secret marriage, most unhappy



to tell of. But the same natural pride and hatred of prying curiosity—the same reserve, with regard to his own personal matters, which in maturer life had characterized the man, had, when a youth, driven him to the extreme of suffering, and almost want, rather than to making a clear explanation to his parents and friends of the first rash step and its calamitous consequences.

The marriage which the doctor had formed while yet scarcely more than a boy was degrading, as well as miserable. An artful woman of great personal attractions, but of low principles and mean habits, had lived long enough as his wife to make such demands upon his pecuniary resources as it was impossible for him to supply, without falling under suspicions perhaps more degrading to his character than even such a connection would have been considered. Hence followed family disputes, alienation, mystery, with endless schemes for subterfuge and concealment—all most ruinous to the character and principles of a young man just entering upon life. What might have been the extent of ruin following as an inevitable consequence of such a system long pursued, it would be impossible to conceive. Before the expiration of three years, however, the unhappy woman died. There was truth in the old aunt's story; for she left a child, who was carefully, though humbly nurtured, until the time for sending her to school, where she remained until supposed to be qualified for entering a situation as governess. Such a situation had been obtained for her at Brighton, where, however, her health entirely failed; and it was under the difficulty of not knowing what to do in such circumstances that the doctor had first listened to that proposal which ended in Lina, his daughter, being introduced into the house as companion to his wife.

The recital of these events connected with his past life called forth no reproach on the part of Jessie. She



could thoroughly and sincerely pity him here, for the calamitous mistake into which he had been betrayed. It was the secret kept from her so long which she resented, especially while he placed her under circumstances in which she ought to have known the whole truth. These reproaches, however, as already said, were soon entirely discontinued. The subject of injury was never alluded to after the first outbreak of indignant feeling. Had her husband been quite well and strong, it is just possible that Jessie's indignation might have been longer in subsiding; but whether owing to this shock to his feelings, or to some other cause, he did not recover from the fever as had been anticipated. Something like a relapse came on, and for many weeks he remained so far from well as to be unable to pursue his accustomed avocations.

It may well be supposed what anxiety this long delay would cause the doctor, because he was now able to hear of all that was transpiring in the neighborhood, and was even consulted about measures for the public good, without being able to render any personal assistance. There were sick families, especially among the poor, in whose welfare he was deeply interested. And thus it came about by degrees that Jessie began to be associated with her husband in such matters, actually sent out sometimes to see after his humble friends, and always welcomed back again from such errands with a pride and a joy of which any ambassador might have been proud.

But Jessie was not proud now. That fault was well-nigh cured, and with it many others. A long season of affliction, and no small share of hard practical duty, had wrought a blessed change in Jessie. With the exception of that speaking of her mind to which allusion has been made, there was so little left of her old habits and feel-



ings, that sometimes she felt scarcely to know herself. It did not enter her mind to consider herself a better woman. She only knew that she was happier, and she thanked her Heavenly Father devoutly for that, as well as for making her more useful to her fellow-beings.

With Jessie the change was practical, as well as deep. She seemed to arise and shake herself from all the dust, and cobwebs, and entanglements of her former state. The first domestic measure she adopted, after the funeral services were over, was to call up Mabel, the house-keeper, and to request her to suit herself with another situation at her earliest convenience. Jessie had felt the insidious power of this woman's tongue, and she was humbled at the recollection of the influence it had sometimes exercised over her own feelings. Every thing must be got rid of now that was in any way involved in the entanglements of the past. Jessie wanted a clear course—a broad, open path, in which she might walk with the blessed sunshine of God's truth upon her head. She had always loved truth. Her natural tendencies were not toward falsehood or deception, and she had never loathed herself so much as when she watched or suspected others. This had been in a manner forced upon her, and there was truth in her words when she said that she might have been a better, as well as a happier woman, if she had been more worthily treated—made a rational companion, not a mere toy.

But those days were past now, and gradually the reproaches of the heart also died away as entirely as if they had never found utterance on the tongue. One of the great necessities of Jessie's nature was now supplied. She had ample occupation; and seeing, to his astonishment, what a wise, as well as active and efficient woman she could be, her husband determined to continue that system, if only for her benefit, which had been resorted




to under severe necessity. He saw now what a noble woman he had been keeping like a captive in a cage; for captive indeed her better nature had long been. He felt now what a companion, what a help he had lost, and how comparatively worthless his own life had consequently been.

As many of the occupations which now devolved upon Jessie led her to the abodes of suffering and want, she became acquainted with aspects of human life to which, up to this time, she had been almost a total stranger. The spectacles she thus witnessed melted her own heart. The sympathy they called forth enlarged the circle of her being. The need she found for directing and supporting others in their religious hopes, imparted life and elevation to her own. In her ministrations of charity, she learned to say and to do what would formerly have been regarded as impossible. As one proof of the entireness of the change which had passed over her, Jessie seldom remembered her own beauty, and forgot to look for the admiration it had once called forth. Those, however, who beheld her going forth on errands of mercy, looked at her with astonishment; and often, as they spoke one to another of the change in her habits and character, declared that to them she looked tenfold more beautiful than she had ever looked before.

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